

Mastering Stage Presence: How to Present to Any Audience

Course Guidebook

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Ms. Long has directed more than 30 productions Off-Broadway, Off-Off-Broadway, regionally, and at the university level. Productions range from classics, such as *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to her original adaptation of the Gabriel García Márquez short story *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* for the Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab. Her musical adaptation of *The Frog Prince* recently premiered at Georgia Shakespeare. As a performer, Ms. Long has appeared on various Atlanta stages, including the Alliance Theatre, Theatrical Outfit, and Theatre Gael.

Ms. Long has received numerous awards, including the Ken Bryant Outstanding Directing Award, three Lotta M. Crabtree Theatrical Trust Awards, multiple Certificates of Merit for directing from the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, and a coveted finalist rank in the National Endowment for the Arts/Theatre Communications Group Career Development Program for Directors.

Ms. Long's publications include two annotations of Shakespeare (*The Tempest* and *Julius Caesar*) for Teacher's Discovery and the book and lyrics for *The Frog Prince* with composer James Woodward. Her work as a vocalist and musician can be heard on the original cast recording of *Appalachian Christmas*. ■

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Mastering Stage Presence: How to Present to Any Audience

Scope:

Presence is expressing who you are and what you believe when you're at your very best. This course is about learning to offer your best self to the world by cultivating your self-awareness, your body, and your voice. The ability to fully express oneself is vital to effective connection and communication. When we understand our purpose and how to clearly communicate it with our bodies and voices, we can grow our presence on stage and in life.

In this course, you will investigate the relationship between motivation and expression. You will explore psychological and physiological approaches to accessing purpose on stage. You will also examine the role of personal context in creating both fictitious characters and the character of your best self. And you will heighten your awareness of the physical and vocal habits that get in the way of clear expression and the habits that allow you to speak and move at your greatest potential.

The experiential study of performance technique begins with growing self-awareness. Starting with your physical life, you will examine the body as a conduit for breath and as an interpreter of intention. You will access constructive ways of resting, standing still, traveling through space, and gesturing. You will begin to understand the difference between tension and freedom and between balance and imbalance. You will learn how to extend productive physical effort to support your purpose.

Your understanding of a free, aligned body allows you to better access the foundation of any performance: the breath. With a full, supported breath, you allow your voice to be heard. You will learn about vocal dynamics, including tone, pitch, and volume. Then, you will shape your sound into meaningful communication through the physical act of speech. You will experiment with

the music of language: emphasis, pace, and phrasing. You will also examine how speech patterns develop and what people do to learn or change them.

In the last section of the course, you will explore various performance scenarios, including the productive rehearsal, the effective audition or interview, the attack of the butterflies, and the tools for maintaining an audience's attention. Finally, you will explore what stage presence can teach you about presence in all forms.

This course offers a comprehensive introduction to the joy of performing—an art that is equal parts mystery and technique. ■

The Performance Triangle

Lecture 1

Expressing who you are and what you believe when you're at your very best. Going after what you want with clarity and focus. That's what this course is about—the *what* and *how* of presence, on stage and in life. It is about learning to offer your best self to the world by cultivating your self-awareness, your body, and your voice. In this lecture, you will learn that people learn performance technique by first becoming aware of themselves and their potentials, then making conscious physical and vocal choices, and, finally, practicing those choices until they become second nature.

One Step at a Time

- When you learn almost any new skill—golf, tennis, piano, drawing, cooking—you learn it in a series of steps. First, you have to feel safe enough to try it. Then, you have to imagine yourself doing it. Then, you have to commit to trying it. Once you commit, you become aware of how you need to move. Then, you learn one move at a time.
- Finally, you integrate the movements together in one constant motion, but you probably still have to think about it. If you practice enough, though, you'll eventually be able to do it without thinking. It might surprise you to know that is how people learn stage presence—one step at a time.



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Playing the piano is a skill that you learn in a series of steps, just like stage presence.

- There's a myth in performance that can be referred to as the you-either-have-it-or-you-don't myth. People think sometimes that they should just be able to step on stage and deliver an amazing speech or act a role flawlessly. And, yes, there are a lucky few with this innate ability. But there are many, many others who grow into confident performance.
- Most of the time, when you see someone on stage and that person makes it look easy, it's because he or she has been trained to make it look easy. Most performers train. They learn technique. And just like in golf—or tennis, or piano, or drawing, or cooking—learning performance technique involves building one skill on another, and then another.

The Performance Triangle

- There are three basic building blocks of performance technique. You can think of it as a triangle. In the center of the triangle is your presence—your performance persona, which is your best self or the character you're playing. The three sides of the triangle deal with mental focus, voice and speech, and body. But to create your triangle, you have to build the sides.
- You start with the base: mental focus. You first make the commitment to train, or speak, or act, or tell a story. And at the very beginning, you want to nurture a sense of safety, because one of the biggest obstacles to growth on stage is the fear of looking silly or appearing vulnerable. That can really hold us back.
- So, you create a physical and mental space where you feel safe—where it's okay to take risks and it's definitely okay to fail. Giving yourself the space to fail actually gives you the courage to take the risks. And risk leads to growth.
- That sense of space allows you to focus in on what you want to do and why you want to do it. You start to bring your imagination to the work. You bring your sense of play and your sense of humor. If you plan to act, you might begin to imagine the perspective of

a character that might be very different from you. If you plan to speak, you might start to visualize the version of yourself that you want to present. You explore the purpose behind whatever kind of performance you're going to do.

- You also become more conscious of the self you bring to the performance—your talents, your perceived limitations, your physical and vocal habits. We all have habits—some that work very well for performance and some that don't. You start to understand your personal context—what made you the person you are today. You start to understand how that context impacts how you communicate. You become aware of the learned physical and vocal habits that serve you, and the ones that don't.
- With this new awareness, you begin to build the second side of your performance triangle: your physical life. You begin to consider how you use your body, both as a conduit for your breath and as an interpreter of your intention.
- Soon, what you thought of as an unavoidable habit now becomes a choice. You find new ways of accessing your energy and conserving it. You exchange old, limiting patterns of movement for new ways of resting, standing still, traveling through space, and gesturing. You begin to understand the difference between tension and freedom, and between balance and imbalance. You learn to extend constructive effort to support your purpose, and you start to let go of the holding patterns that get in the way of fully expressing yourself. You find that when you adjust your physical life, you can better access the foundation of any performance: your breath.
- So, then we begin to think about breath. As you access your breath, you begin to build the third side of the triangle: your speaking voice. With speaking, the focus is both on your sound, or your voice, and the way you shape your sound, or your speech.
- We start just with sound. We learn techniques to support the breath. We experience how sound vibrates and resonates in our bodies. We

learn the dynamics of vocal production: tone, pitch, and volume. We exercise our vocal muscles so that we can meet our potential for free and supported sound. We let our voices be heard.

- Then, we turn our attention to speech, or to being understood. We begin to see speech as a physical act that shapes our intention and perception of our intention. We start to shape our sound into meaningful communication with our speaking mechanisms: our lips, our teeth, our tongues, and our facial muscles. We bring clarity to our speech by knowing and then using all the sounds of language available to us. Then, we experiment with the music of language—the qualities that make up rhythm and cadence: emphasis, pace, and phrasing.
- In addition to needing each side of the performance triangle to create a performance, you need practice and repetition, which are the ways to achieve true integration and to really digest a new skill. With repetition and consciousness and focus on the right things, you can gradually become more confident in your performing persona. You stop having to think about every little thing; your muscle memory takes over. All the conscious work you've done in each area becomes automatic integration.

Ensemble Building

- The first thing a performer needs is a safe space—a space for creating and expanding. It's difficult to build confidence or risk growing in any way when you don't have a space where you can work and feel safe doing it.
- So, the first thing we do in any kind of performance class is help people get comfortable. This is called ensemble building. We teach people to trust themselves and each other, because we know that people experience the greatest growth in an atmosphere of support, where risk taking is encouraged. We know that the more comfortable you feel, the more confidently you perform.

- It's important to create a comfortable physical environment. While you take this course, try to find your own quiet little corner of the world, where (at least while you're studying) no one is going to walk through and ask you what you're doing.
- You might try turning off your phone or your computer during this time. You might even delineate your space with a piece of rope, or a row of chairs, or a curtain—just something that defines a few square feet of quiet, empty space where you can sit and move around a little.
- You might put in this space a few things that inspire you, that remind you of who you are at your best. These can be almost anything—meaningful words or phrases, an item from your travels, or some object of special significance that pleases you when you look at it. You want to have just a few things that make you happy and relaxed.
- And—especially if your space has a hardwood floor—you might want a soft mat. You might move around and lie down sometimes, and you want to be comfortable. You might also want to have a chair handy to use in the space as well. A full-length mirror might be beneficial for moments when you want to check yourself out, but it's not required. And if a mirror makes you feel self-conscious in any way, it's best to skip it. Try to be conscious about creating a physical space for your work, a space that you enjoy.
- Also remember to make space for the work in what you wear. Work in comfortable clothes that are easy to move in. You can be barefoot, or in sock feet, or you can wear athletic shoes—whatever makes you feel most comfortable. Because you'll want to focus on finding freedom and alignment in your body, it's best to avoid things that might inhibit freedom and alignment, such as constrictive clothing.
- It's also important to be conscious about creating a mental space for your work. Most people have been in situations where they felt like they were going to be judged no matter what they did. In

those situations, people generally shut down. They stop extending themselves, they stop trying, and they stop risking, because they don't want to be squashed. It's human nature.

- Sometimes, this comes from the outside, from a boss, a well-meaning spouse, or an exacting teacher. But often, the nay-saying doesn't come from somebody else. It comes from inside. Sometimes, it's your own chatter that clutters your space.
- So, just as we clean the clutter out of our physical work space, we clean the clutter out of our mental work space when we train. When we learn performance technique, we make our minds and bodies ready for expansion. We give ourselves the space to be challenged—to go beyond our limitations and see what's on the other side. And, often, what's on the other side is something you never thought you could do.

Suggested Reading

Cameron, *The Artist's Way*, Weeks 1 and 2.

Farhi, *Bringing Yoga to Life*, Part 1.

Questions to Consider

1. Recall (or go see) a live performance that you thought was especially effective. Choose your favorite character or speaker and describe what made the performance compelling.
2. What do you love most about performing? What do you fear most about performing?

Modern Acting Technique

Lecture 2

Everyone has something to learn from what is known as modern acting technique. We all play many roles in our lives, and we present ourselves on many stages—whether we’re acting a role or just going through our day-to-day lives. Every role we play on every stage requires knowledge of and commitment to our purpose. Purpose is what modern acting technique is built around; what we do on any stage, whether it’s a theater or a boardroom, needs to have a specific purpose. This lecture will introduce you to two fundamental approaches to accessing purpose in performance: performance from the inside out and performance from the outside in.

Performance from the Inside Out

- When we talk about performance from the inside out, we’re talking about vocal and physical expression that emanates from inner impulses. We connect with our inner purpose; we access our own inner psychological experiences and then extend those into our bodies.
- In the grand scheme of things, this inside-out approach to performance is relatively new. To put it into context, the following is a quick thumbnail of Western acting technique up to the present. We begin in 6th century B.C., when a Greek poet named Thespis steps out from the crowd—the chorus—and speaks all by himself. So, Thespis was our first actor. And that’s where we get the word “thespian.”
- Next, think about a Greek amphitheater: It’s outside. It seats about 15,000 people, which means that there isn’t much room for subtlety. Plus, the Greeks loved big masks and robes and platform shoes and breast-beating tragedies. So, their acting style naturally evolves into a presentational, declamatory way of performing.

- Then, just after 800 B.C., we get the Romans. They continue this tradition—only they throw in a few more laughs from their bawdy carnivals and religious celebrations.
- Then, there's the rise of Christianity from around 300 B.C. through the Middle Ages. We lose the bawdy but we keep the masks and pageantry in the religious plays of the Middle Ages.
- In the 14th century, we get a little of the bawdy back with the Italian *commedia dell'arte*—which was an early form of improvisational comedy—and by the time Shakespeare comes along in the late 16th century, we have fewer masks and smaller performance spaces.
- Even though Shakespeare gives us characters with complicated psychologies like Richard III and King Lear, there's still no formal recognition of the character's interior life, except maybe in Hamlet's "speak the speech" monologue, where he tells the players not to overact. So, all this focus on outward physical expression leads to some pretty large acting.
- The theater moves indoors in the 18th century, but we still have this overblown, histrionic style until well into the 19th century. The end of the 18th century is where modern acting technique begins. In 1823, a Russian poet named Pushkin has this amazing realization: He discovers that all the classical playwrights have one thing in common: an interest in presenting truth in character and situation.
- Then, in the late 1800s, we get Freud and Jung and the new psychology. Freud's idea of the subconscious—of motivating factors beneath the surface—finds its way into acting technique as subtext. Carl Jung's theories of psychological archetypes—the mother, the trickster, the shadow self—start to influence the way actors and writers look at character. The Lumière brothers begin to experiment with film, which is a closer and more intimate medium than the stage.

- Finally, we get the Russian actor Konstantin Stanislavsky, who applies this search for “believable truth,” this quest for purpose, to acting technique. Stanislavsky’s ideas have spawned a host of acting studios, theater companies, master teachers, and actors. His overreaching idea that purpose is the root of performance is now the basis for most drama programs in the United States. This organic, purpose-driven approach to acting is still pretty new, but it’s had an enormous impact on performance in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Performance from the Outside In

- Another equally valid approach to performance is one from the outside in, where physical impulses inform your interior life. Have you ever forced yourself to smile during a really bad day and actually felt a little happier? Or have you ever willed yourself to act confidently when you were secretly scared to death, and then found that you actually felt a little more confident? That’s working outside in.
- There’s scientific evidence that this approach works in life as well as on stage. Psychologist Paul Ekman and his colleagues did multiple studies on facial expressions, emotion, and physiology, and they found that when they asked subjects to adopt a certain facial expression, such as fear, the subjects had physiological responses associated with that emotion—responses like changes in heart rate, body temperature, and even perspiration.
- So, when you work outside in, you find the voice, the posture, and the gait of a character first—instead of the other way around—and that informs the character’s psychology. For example, you might come up with a rhythm of speaking or with a series of tasks or gestures that convey character and create emotional response.
- Or actors may find character through specifically sequencing each tiny physical action. They say the line, then sit, then stir the cup of tea, then tap the spoon on the cup, and then put the spoon on the saucer. Or they stand, sip the tea, stir and tap, and say the line. How

they choose to sequence these actions informs the emotional life of their character and leads them to other choices.

- So, your physical choices can inform your inner life. Notice, though, that working from the outside in still requires you to understand your context, and it doesn't negate an interior life. It's just another effective means to creating purposeful performance.

Purpose in Performance

- In his book *An Actor Prepares*, published in 1936, Stanislavsky notes that a performer or presenter needs to earn the right to be in front of the audience and that he or she earns it by specifically, vitally connecting to their purpose on stage. Stanislavsky says nothing about talent or experience; he just says that whatever you do on stage needs to have a specific purpose.
- In other words, focus on *what* you're doing instead of *how well* you're doing it. Why? Because self-consciousness is the enemy of connected, spontaneous performance. It's also behind what's known as stage fright. The clearer and more compelling your purpose is, the less room there is in your brain for stage fright.
- The great irony of performance study is that you increase your self-awareness and understanding of technique only to lose it—only to have it ultimately become second nature in serving your purpose. So, when you play someone other than yourself under imaginary circumstances, your character has to know why he or she is there—why he or she is in that particular place, at that particular time, with that particular person. What has your character come there to do? That's purpose.
- And when you make a presentation, you also have to know why you're there. Why are you at this event, at this time, with this group of people? What have you come there to do? You might introduce someone, or explain a product, or sell your company's services, but you need to know why you're doing what you're doing. That's purpose.

- It seems simple, but people miss this first step, no matter what approach they take. They step on stage and focus on appearing competent and powerful. Or they whip themselves into an emotional tizzy just for the sake of showing emotion. Or they focus on executing a series of physical gestures without first thinking about why they're doing them.
- There's nothing wrong with competence and power and emotion and gestures, and there's nothing wrong with focusing on any of these when you're rehearsing. But come performance time, these are the by-products of understanding and committing to your purpose. If you know specifically what you're there to do and set about doing it as effectively as you possibly can, then competence, power, and true, connected emotion and physical life will take care of themselves.
- Think about all the situations that require stage presence: acting, public speaking, meetings, interviews, conferences. Every situation presents specific challenges, but all of them share this same foundation first introduced by Stanislavsky. All of them require you to deeply connect with your purpose—with your objective, or goal.
- Are you there to convince your boss to give you a raise? Are you there to pull your oldest friend through a devastating loss? Is your character there to force a lying cheat to come clean, or to win back a lover who is about to leave? Your purpose has to be specific.
- So, how do you find your specific purpose on any stage? You first need to connect with your material or context. Think about a play. A well-written play is a satisfying progression of action. For action to progress—for a play to hold our attention—characters have to change. Your moments in a scene are a series of choices. Your smaller choices add up to a larger change in character. A character needs to start somewhere and end in a different place.
- So, working on dramatic material requires mental and physical focus. To do dramatic material, you've got to do your homework.

You've got to be a detective. You've got to find out who your character is. You need to know your material intimately. You need to understand your context.



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Public speaking often involves being both an actor and a playwright.

- The same goes for public speaking. Why do we go to hear a speaker? We go to hear someone express a particular point of view about a particular subject. We go to be inspired, informed, or persuaded. We go to know more, or understand more, or even to strengthen what we already believe. We go to be changed. Like a well-written play, the content of any presentation is a series of choices in the service of an overall goal, a purpose.
- With public speaking, you're often the actor *and* the playwright. If your presentation requires research, you're still a detective. You still need to know your context. But now you're the creator, the playwright. And like a playwright, you need to craft your content carefully. Everything you say—the words you choose, the structure you create, the information you decide to include or leave out, the length of your sentences, your level of formality, your use of detail and anecdotes—reflects your overall purpose as a speaker. So, crafting your message and connecting with your material takes time and reflection.
- Knowing your material doesn't mean just memorizing your lines. Of course, you need to know your lines, but performing requires more than memorization. It requires clear understanding

of and commitment to pursuing your goal. It's not enough to move beautifully and speak clearly, even though that helps a lot. Audiences will forgive imperfections, and maybe even identify with them, if you have a deep understanding of what you want to communicate—that is, your purpose.

Suggested Reading

Barton, *Acting*, Chap. 4.

Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*.

Questions to Consider

1. Observe an exchange between two people in your everyday life. It can be between coworkers, parents and children, siblings, or romantic partners. What do the two people want from one another? How are they trying to get it? Now watch a scene in theater or film, or a speech. Can you tell what the speaker or characters want from one another?
2. Think of a time in your own life when you worked inside out: You brought what you knew from your own context and used it to understand the perspective of another person. Now think of a time when you worked outside in, when you made a physical choice that informed your inner state of mind. Do you find these ways of working or thinking effective? Why, or why not?

Building a Character

Lecture 3

If we're playing a character, it's our job to figure out what makes that character tick. If we're playing some version of ourselves in a public scenario, it's our job to consciously understand our own motivation. As performers, it's our job to understand context; then, it's our job to extend that context into action. In this lecture, you will explore Uta Hagen's nine questions and then apply them to a theatrical scene (scene 2) between Blanche and Stanley from Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Uta Hagen's Nine Questions

- One of the best systems for accessing purpose and connecting with material is a series of questions devised by the Tony Award-winning actress and teacher Uta Hagen. She's most famous for originating the role of Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* on Broadway in 1962, but she also trained generations of actors. She wrote two books, *Respect for Acting* and *A Challenge for the Actor*, both of which are widely used in acting courses today.
- When we first start to work on a play, a character, or a speech, we start with objective truth. We read a play or situation like a detective. We're looking for psychological artifacts. We find the facts—we dig, we research, we scrutinize.
- Once we have the facts, we start to infer and interpret. We start to look at the truth subjectively. We experiment in rehearsal. We listen and respond to our partners. We try different ways of saying lines or sequencing our actions. Finally, after lots of trial and error, we arrive at our performance.
- Uta Hagen's nine questions are as follows.
 1. Who am I?
 2. What time is it?

3. Where am I?
 4. What surrounds me?
 5. What are my given circumstances?
 6. What is my relationship?
 7. What do I want?
 8. What is in my way?
 9. What do I do to get what I want?
- These questions might seem pretty straightforward, but they're also pretty loaded. We're looking for specific, in-depth information—stuff that leads to depth and nuance in performance. Unless you consider these questions in great detail, and develop complete and thoughtful answers to them, you run the risk of creating a generalized, sometimes misinformed performance.

Who Am I?

- The “Who am I?” question is about much more than our names or the name of our character. We're talking about our physical characteristics—gender, age, height, weight. We're talking about our health, appearance, posture, hair, skin, and eyes.
- We're also thinking about who we are sociologically. What's our class, occupation, religion, race? What's our nationality, political affiliation, standing in our community? All of these have an effect on who we are psychologically: our behaviors, moral standards, ambitions, personal habits, frustrations, abilities, intelligence. It also affects how we want to appear to others.
- So, if we apply this question to Blanche in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* and take all the details given to us by the play, we might come up with something like the following.

- My name is Blanche DuBois. My name means “white woods” in French. I wear a white suit with a fluffy bodice, pearls, and gloves. I remind people of a moth or a butterfly. I have to shimmer and glow. I’m 30 years old—ancient as far as men are concerned. I was married once, but the boy died. He shot himself. I teach high school English, but I was recently separated from my job. I love poetry and literature. I love soft light and beauty.
- I was born and raised in Laurel, Mississippi, just north of Hattiesburg and just over two hours from New Orleans. I speak a bit of French; my family descended from French Huguenots, and they owned a plantation called Belle Reve, which means “beautiful dream” in French. As my parents and relatives died off, our estate dwindled, sold off bit by bit. Now all that’s left to show for it are stacks of papers from lawyers and loan officers. My sister Stella left Mississippi for New Orleans a few years ago, but I stayed behind to care for our parents and sick relatives.
- Laurel was a very social place. A place where class and bloodline were important. I grew up going to deb balls and parties and wearing beautiful dresses and enjoying the attentions of young men. My family instilled in me the importance of keeping up appearances. I learned from them that beauty is more important than truth.
- So, as we collect the psychological artifacts, we begin to visualize. We get the facts from the dialogue and stage directions in the script, and we do a little historical research. We start to see why Blanche drinks and tells lies and spends money and seduces young men. She has to keep up appearances. She has to keep beauty alive—because, the way Blanche sees it, the world around her is crumbling. Beauty is all she’s got left, and it’s fading fast.
- Blanche’s partner in this scene, Stanley Kowalski, is a formidable adversary. He comes from a very different background than

Blanche. If we were to answer the “Who Am I?” question for Stanley, it might look something like the following.

- My name is Stanley Kowalski. Kowalski’s a Polish name, but I’m a hundred percent American and proud of it. I’m 28 years old, about 5 foot 9. I’m solid. Strong. During the war, I was promoted to a Master Sergeant in the Engineer Corps, which is almost as high as an enlisted man can go. I’m a decorated officer. That means something.
- Now I work for a plant. We build precision parts. I started on the floor, but I moved up to traveling. Soon I might move up again.
- I like women. I size ’em up fast. I don’t go in for glamour or fancy furs and jewelry. People need to be who they are and lay their cards on the table. I like hanging out with the guys. Sometimes I drink too much. I wind up hitting someone. But everyone knows it’s just because I’m drunk.
- I love beer, red meat, cars, poker, bowling. I like bright-colored lights. I talk loud; I wear loud clothes. Someone told me my astrological sign is a Capricorn—a goat. I don’t go in for that stuff, but if it means I’m stubborn and matter-of-fact, what can I say? Maybe the shoe fits.
- I strike some people as the “unrefined type.” I’m just after the truth. I want to appear strong, manly, tough, sexy. I want everyone to know I’m the guy in charge. I pay attention to what’s going on, and people pay attention to me.
- All these images of Stanley in the script are going to lead you to a very different physical and emotional life than what we just began with Blanche. Stanley has bravado, a swagger. The script says he’s like a rooster. So, an actor using the outside-in approach might experiment with strutting around a bit. The actor might see what it feels like to literally lay all his cards on the table. How might Stanley hand someone a package of meat? How might he hold a cigar?

What Time Is It?

- Time means many different things. Of course, we have the minute, the hour, the day, and the month, but we also have the time period we happen to live in, which may impact our social choices or our risk taking. We have the time of year, which might affect what we wear or how we move. We have the stage of life we're in, which has a lot to do with how we view the present.
- So, what time is it for Blanche and Stanley? The script tells us that it's early May 1947, which was exactly two years after the Germans surrendered to the Allies. Servicemen were returning home. The social landscape was changing. Women had gone to work. They'd tasted independence, but society still expected a young woman to be married by at least age 25.
- American industry was booming after a long period of war rations. Rations had changed what technology people could have. It changed what they ate and how much fabric they used for suits and dresses—all sorts of things. So, people were finally becoming consumers again after a long period of deprivation. They could buy things again, and that led to more jobs like the one Stanley has.
- For Blanche, this new world makes her feel like she's on shaky ground, like her best years are behind her. The social rules are changing. Stanley's "What time is it?" reads very differently. Life is just beginning for Stanley, while Blanche sees this time as her last chance at happiness.

Where Am I?

- This question asks about your geographic location, but it also asks about the significance of that location. Place is powerful. There's memory in place; there are feelings of power or inadequacy, feelings of freedom or confinement. How many people leave the tiny town they grew up in and redefine themselves somewhere else? How many people downsize from the frenetic pace of city life to a more tranquil rhythm in a smaller place?

- We want to understand the physical size and characteristics of our place or venue and look at the conditions they create: the climate, the atmosphere, the sound quality, and, most importantly, our sense of ourselves in that place.
- Blanche and Stanley are in the exact same place, but where they are means something very different to each of them. Blanche is visiting New Orleans for the first time. She's in Elysian Fields, a neighborhood between the railroad tracks and the Mississippi River. People from Blanche's background don't find themselves in neighborhoods near the tracks very often. She feels like she is on another planet—and this planet is Stanley's turf.
- Stanley's "Where am I?" paints a completely different picture of the exact same place. For him, Elysian Fields is a place where no one cares what color you are or where you came from. It's a place where a person can be recognized for who he is. He doesn't have to put on airs; he doesn't have to be fancy.

What Surrounds Me?

- This question requires the performer to specifically understand the space he or she is in, to endow the set, props, and walls with significance that'll inform the action. Sometimes this information is in the script or on the stage, but sometimes we have to use our imagination. Typically, actors will embellish these facts and make juicy choices when it comes to detail.



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When building a character, it is important to consider the period of time in which the character lives.

- And different actors make different choices. For example, an actress playing Blanche might respond most strongly to a dirty undershirt Stanley leaves on the couch. Or Blanche might come unglued from hearing all the sounds of the world she's in. So, pay attention to the details. Embellish. Expand.

What Are My Given Circumstances?

- What are the events that led up to the moment when the scene or speech begins, and how do they color how you'll play it? What's the backstory of the situation you're walking into?
- Blanche's backstory is that she eloped with a boy when she was 16. She found him in bed with an older man who had been his friend for years. When she confronted him, he shot himself. This memory is always with her. Blanche has been on a downward spiral for the past two years; she's about to crack.
- Stanley's given circumstances are that he came home to find Blanche with all her things. Stella didn't tell him Blanche was coming, and judging from her luggage, it looks like Blanche is going to stay awhile. She's also been drinking some of his best liquor, and then lying about it. Stanley is going to confront Blanche.

Suggested Reading

Hagen, with Frankel, *Respect for Acting*.

Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Questions to Consider

1. Uta Hagen's two minutes alone exercise: Think about two minutes from your own life when you were alone and pursuing a simple goal. The goal does not have to be an urgent one. Examples of two minutes alone might be preparing to sit down at the computer, getting ready to open a letter from someone, completing a task so that you can rest, etc. Answer Uta Hagen's first five questions for your two minutes alone.

2. Think of a situation from the stage or from your own life where a character or person made a very different choice than one you would make. Pretend you are going to play that person and apply Uta Hagen's first five questions to understand the character's context.

Analyzing Backstory and Motivation

Lecture 4

This lecture continues to explore purpose. Specifically, it will explore *what*. The last four questions in Uta Hagen's series of nine questions begin with the word "what": What are my relationships? What do I want? What's in my way? What do I do to get what I want? All of these questions apply in any meaningful interaction, not just through the lens of a play, although this lecture will apply them first to Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Then, these tools will be applied to a commencement speech given by Barbara Bush.

What Are My Relationships?

- This question refers to any relationship that impacts a situation, whether the person is present or not. For example, think about a parent-teacher conference: Parents might discuss a child while the child isn't there. But their relationship with the child and their relationship to each other is just as much a part of the conference as their relationship with the teacher. You can also have a relationship to objects and surroundings. A certain scent can remind you of your grandmother's cooking, for example.
- Returning to Blanche and Stanley from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, what are their relationships? From Blanche's dialogue in scene 2, we determine that she views Stanley as ungentlemanly, rude, and animal-like. She thinks that he will destroy her, unless she can tame him.
- Blanche also has a relationship to a stack of letters in this scene. They're love letters from her late husband that she has kept all these years. If you're working from the outside in, these letters would be an excellent prop to explore and endow. How might Blanche handle them? If you're working from the inside out, an actress playing Blanche might get a picture in her mind of what her husband looked like, and she might think of him every time she handles the letters.

- How might Stanley answer this relationship question with regard to Blanche? The following is a sample.
 - Blanche is Stella's older sister, and am I glad I got the younger one! From the minute Blanche showed up, she's been lying and fishing for compliments. If she wasn't my wife's sister, "I'd get ideas about [her]." She's not bad looking, but I can't stand a woman who asks me to tell her she's pretty. And I'm not taken in by her Hollywood, damsel-in-distress act. Stella says Blanche's nerves are gone, that she'll go to pieces if I ask about our plantation, but I know a liar when I see one. She spent Stella's money on all those fine things she showed up with. She swindled my wife, and when she swindles my wife, she swindles me.
- Then, of course, both Blanche and Stanley have a relationship to Stella. Blanche and Stanley are fighting for Stella's loyalty. And that dynamic is in every scene they have together, even when Stella's not there.

What Do I Want?

- Typically, with a play, we answer this question two ways. First, we look at what a character wants in each scene. Then, we connect all those dots of purpose together to create the character's overarching objective for the whole play. Stanislavsky called this the super-objective. If you were to extend this idea to organizations, you might compare the super-objective to a long-range mission statement. And the scene objectives are the short-term goals that lead to the accomplishment of that long-range mission.
- Blanche's super-objective might be to save herself from mental, emotional, and financial ruin. And Stanley's super-objective might be to hold onto a future that's rightfully his.
- In the smaller scenes, your answer to the "What do I want?" question has to be more specific. It's most effective if you phrase it in terms of the person or people you're sharing the stage with. So, wanting something like "to be left alone" isn't specific enough. And

objectives like wanting to show your strength or your competence cause you to focus on yourself and become self-conscious.

- So, as a performer, you're most effective when you want something from your partner. Focusing on your partner allows you to spend your performance energy thinking about what you're doing instead of how well you're doing it.
- So, what does Blanche want from Stanley? What does Stanley want from Blanche? You want to phrase your objective in simple, playable terms. It should be something that you can actually do to your partner. And you should be able to test its success by observing your partner.
- So, Blanche's objective in scene 2 might be the following: *to win over an angry wolf who threatens my safety*. And Stanley's objective might be the following: *to force a lying swindler to tell the truth*. You can play these things. Even though your objective is simple, you choose it carefully, because it colors all your choices throughout the scene.

What's in My Way, and What Do I Do to Get What I Want?

- The obstacles in our path are what create the drama that forces us to do something. So, what's in the way of these characters, and what do they do to get what they want?
- Blanche's obstacles are, first, that she's just been through an ordeal, and her confidence is shaken. Second, she's on Stanley's turf. Third, Blanche doesn't have experience with people like Stanley. Finally, Blanche is physically and mentally weaker than Stanley. Throughout the play, Blanche puts her hopes into the one tactic that's worked for her in the past: seduction. She'll tame the wolf if she can seduce him.
- Next, let's examine Stanley's obstacles and tactics. First, Blanche has been trying to take over the space. Second, Stanley knows that Blanche is better educated than he is and that she knows how to

use her education to evade him. Finally, Stanley knows that he's dealing with a confirmed liar. So, he violates Blanche's privacy by grabbing her precious letters and rattling her into telling the truth. At the end of the play, Stanley commits the ultimate violation: He rapes Blanche.

- Blanche and Stanley do not do all of these tactics all at once. They play their tactics one at a time and in direct response to the obstacles they're giving each other. And they're always watching each other to see if their tactics are succeeding.
- If a tactic isn't working, they have two choices: They can change their tactics and try something else, or they can intensify the tactic they're playing. But they can only play one tactic at a time. If they try to play them all at once, the audience won't be clear on what they're trying to do.



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Uta Hagen's nine questions can be applied to public speaking.

- In rehearsal and in performance, both actors keep checking in with each other, listening, and responding, always as if they're hearing the lines for the first time. The test of their success—whether or not a tactic is working—is always in their partner. And tactics may change based on the responses they get.
- If you specifically and truthfully pursue what you want from the other person on stage, you'll create an amazing cycle of action and response, where your partner responds to you, which causes you to respond to your partner, which evokes another response, and so on.

This reciprocal exchange between two actors who have integrated this kind of character analysis is exciting and effective.

Public Speaking

- We looked at how to use Uta Hagen's nine questions within a dramatic, one-on-one framework, where the context was given by the playwright. But what about public speaking? How can we use them there? A great example is Barbara Bush's commencement speech to the graduating class at Wellesley College in 1990. It's famous because she had a difficult task to accomplish.
- **Who was Barbara Bush?** She is the wife of George Herbert Walker Bush, 41st president of the United States. She was born in New York City in 1925, and her dad ran McCall's Publishing Company. She'd had a privileged upbringing. In 1941, she met George Bush at a dance. She went to Smith College, but she dropped out in 1943 to marry George Bush before the war.
- **What time was it for Barbara Bush?** It's 1990. Barbara Bush is 65. She's supported her husband through his career. She's raised six kids and now devotes her life to her duties as First Lady and to the cause of literacy. Eight years earlier, the Equal Rights Amendment had failed to be ratified. But the roles of women at home and in the workplace were changing. Young women were being told they could "have it all": a high-powered career, a marriage, and a family. So, after years of struggle, women felt a lot of pressure to achieve in the workplace.
- **Where was Barbara Bush?** She'd come to give this commencement address at Wellesley College, a top women's school just outside of Boston, not unlike the school she'd dropped out of. Boston is a hub of higher education. So, Barbara Bush is in a place where people value career, drive, and accomplishment.
- **What surrounded Barbara Bush?** Barbara Bush was surrounded by an audience of young, ambitious female Wellesley graduates and their families. She's on a stage, behind a podium. Behind

her sit about 20 college administrators and faculty. She was also surrounded by television cameras and microphones from all the major radio and TV networks. The selection of Barbara Bush to speak at Wellesley had caused a national debate.

- **What are Barbara Bush's given circumstances?** Barbara Bush knew that she was Wellesley's second choice for commencement speaker. She also knew that 25 percent of Wellesley's class of 1990 had signed a petition saying that they were "outraged" that she'd been selected to speak, saying that she wasn't a "suitable role model" for career-oriented young women. She didn't stand on her own merit; she'd only been asked because she was the wife of a president. Barbara Bush also knew that this petition had sparked a national debate on how women ought to define themselves.
- **What were Barbara Bush's relationships?** Barbara Bush knew that the 600 young women who were about to leave Wellesley and embark on their careers were ambitious. They'd had a top-notch education from an elite school. They were groomed for professional success. They'd also come of age during a very different era than the one Barbara Bush lived in.
- **What did Barbara Bush want?** She *didn't* want to continue the controversy. She wasn't there to prove that she was right or to defend her choices. Barbara Bush wanted to connect with and honor those women, whether they thought she was a good role model or not.
- **What was in Barbara Bush's way?** Barbara Bush faced some formidable obstacles. There was a significant subgroup of her audience—her partner—who didn't feel she was worthy. She also faced a media storm that had maybe blown this whole thing out of proportion.
- **What did Barbara Bush do to get what she wanted?** Barbara Bush disarmed them. She joked. She reminded the audience that this was the second time she'd been invited to speak at Wellesley.

She flattered them by talking about Wellesley's spirit of excellence and tolerance for diversity. Then, Mrs. Bush spoke frankly. She spoke about the challenges women can face, balancing their careers with the personal connections of friends and family. Barbara Bush ended her speech by suggesting that someone in the audience might someday follow in her footsteps, presiding over the White House as the president's spouse. "And," she said, "I wish him well."

- Barbara Bush's speech was universally hailed as a triumph by everyone who saw it. And it was a triumph because Barbara Bush knew herself. She succeeded in getting what she wanted. She connected with the Wellesley women. She honored them. And she did it with grace and humor.

Suggested Reading

Bush, "Commencement Address at Wellesley College."

Hagen, with Frankel, *Respect for Acting*.

Questions to Consider

1. Continue Uta Hagen's two minutes alone exercise: Answer the last four questions. See if you can re-create your two minutes alone by focusing on what you want and the tactics you use to get it. Try performing it, just for yourself.
2. Continue your study of the situation from the stage or from your own life where a character or person made a very different choice than one you would make. Answer Uta Hagen's last four questions for this. With your understanding of context, could you convincingly pursue the person's objective?

Identifying Your Unconscious Habits

Lecture 5

This lecture shifts from the mental focus side of the performance triangle toward the two technical sides: body and voice. In this lecture, you will begin your study of performance technique, which typically starts with self-awareness. You have to be aware of your habitual self, of how and why you move and speak the way you do. In this lecture, you will learn about how the habitual self develops by examining the acquisition of physical and vocal patterns that occur over a lifetime—patterns that either allow you to work at your expressive potential or get in your way.

Infancy

- When we come into the world, we're poised for life to begin. We have a body and voice with unlimited potential. As infants, we fill the room with sound. We move freely, without stiffness or pain.
- Then, as we grow, we adapt to survive: We channel sound into words, and we learn to direct our physical impulses to get what we need. We begin to exert control over our bodies and voices. We respond to whatever reinforcement we're given: We smile when smiled upon. We speak when listened to. We create all sorts of habits to cope with our world. But under the layers of habit, we create a core of the natural self—the free voice and body we've had since infancy.
- Then, we move into early childhood, and the natural self stays relatively intact. Most small children don't understand the concept of purpose, but they if could, their purpose might be to explore the world or to have fun. Small children aren't particularly conscious of how they speak or move; they're too busy trying to make sense of everything. And they do it through play and trial and error.
- Of course, heredity plays a part. Genetically, you may inherit your grandfather's flat feet, which affects how you walk, or your Aunt

Edna's overbite, which affects how you speak. You may be prone to a certain level of physical activity or inactivity.

- So, we play the hand we're given, to some degree, but we also take up habits. Cultural and psychological experiences begin to manifest themselves physically and vocally in childhood.
- Think about phrases you grew up hearing: "Children should be seen and not heard" or "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." The first word many kids hear is "no." And often it's for their own protection—"No, don't lean out over the stairs."
- We need safety, civility, and kindness in our interactions, and sometimes they have to be taught. But some of these phrases can take root in the voice and body. They may manifest in adults who have trouble speaking out or speaking powerfully when they need to.
- As children, we're taught stage presence by our families. We learn their breathing, mannerisms, movements, and dialects. We learn whether or not people will listen to us when we talk. We learn what kinds of physical choices carry the most weight. We learn the value of speaking or not speaking.
- We reflect what our families value. And as we grow, we either start to look and sound like our families, or we consciously alter our habits to separate from them. Family is our first culture. But movement and speech habits are also influenced by our larger culture or region of the country.
- As children, we digest these kinds of messages, and sometimes we don't even remember them. Then, they manifest themselves in our attitudes toward being on stage. There's memory in our muscles—psychological and physiological.
- Sometimes teasing in childhood can cause constriction in the body and voice; we may not feel we have a right to speak, or we may

stiffen our bodies to shield ourselves from emotional pain. Words hurt. Things don't go the way they should. And our bodies adapt.

- Sometimes—in childhood and later on—we don't use our bodies in ways that allow us to build our abdominal and back muscles. When these muscles are underdeveloped, we sink into posture habits that affect our breath and movement.
- We also sometimes sustain physical injuries that impact how we speak and move. The body moves quickly to compensate for pain, and when pain is gone, our muscles may continue to compensate, as if the initial pain might come back at any second. For example, tight hamstrings can lead to lower back pain, which can cause shoulder and neck tension, which can cause vocal constriction.
- Of course, no childhood is without slings and arrows. Without them we'd be pretty boring people. But sometimes when we know the origin of tension and strain, we can bring it to the surface and begin to release it.

Adolescence

- Adolescence is where a lot of physical and vocal habits begin. Many kids want to avoid ostracism by conforming. Conversely, a few may want to avoid ostracism by rejecting the status quo before it rejects them.
- Part of why we develop vocal and physical habits during this time is that we're trying to cope with the gender pressure brought on by the changes that are occurring. Our bodies place us in one camp or another, male or female. And each camp has its own vocal and physical expectations.
- If you're a male, you realize in adolescence that you're expected to appear strong, loud, and assertive. You may try to dominate more with your voice. You might interrupt more. You're expected to move decisively and powerfully.



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In adolescence, we develop both physical and vocal habits.

- If you're a female, you might be encouraged in adolescence to appear soft, demure, and graceful. Physically aggressive behaviors aren't usually rewarded, though sadly we do see some verbal and emotional aggression in girls. You might position your body in more supportive postures as you listen.
- Neither of you may feel comfortable with your body or your newfound sexuality. So, you draw your shoulders forward to take attention away from your height or your breasts. Conversely, you might try to overcompensate for your developing sexuality by swinging your hips or shoulders when you walk or accentuating parts of your body with gestures. Adolescents who haven't shot up yet develop the habit of pulling their shoulders back and puffing themselves up.
- The desire to fit in changes vocal and physical behavior. We can become very impressionable in times of transition. Different speech rhythms, phrases, and gestures come into vogue. People take these

speech patterns on to conform with their generation. They may adopt a higher pitch or a whisper to sound less aggressive. Or they might develop a bark or a grind to show people they're in charge.

Early Adulthood

- Thankfully, many of us move into young adulthood with some semblance of our selves intact. That's where we look to separate from our birth families—to fill that basic need of autonomy. We may grow more comfortable in our voices and bodies in our 20s, while our habitual selves are still relatively flexible. We're figuring out how to posture ourselves as adults, how to find the appropriate body and the appropriate voice for the new roles we're called upon to play.
- We can also have experiences in early adulthood that cause us to clam up or draw inward. Sometimes self-inflicted abuse of the voice and body begins in early adulthood, including smoking, drinking to excess, and not eating or sleeping well. Sometimes the professions we choose—such as teachers, singers, tour guides, and actors—lead to vocal or physical strain. Physically demanding jobs, such as being a physical trainer or a construction worker, can cause repeated overuse of muscles and can lead to injury.
- You may relocate in early adulthood or beyond, which can play a role in your habits. In urban cultures, you find more people, more ambient noise, and more to compete with in the process of being heard and understood. Urban speakers sometimes learn to overcome these obstacles by moving and speaking more quickly and aggressively. Rural cultures tend to move more slowly.
- Fashion choices can constrict the voice and body. High heels, cowboy boots, and platform shoes all change posture and the ability to support the breath. Tight clothes—neckties and tight jeans or shirts—can also hamper breath and movement.
- Medical procedures, including cosmetic surgery and dental surgery, impact the voice and body. Inactivity—or so much physical activity

that the body becomes accustomed to tightness and tension—can also affect the voice and body.

Middle Adulthood and Beyond

- Finally, we move to middle adulthood and beyond. We start to settle in to who we are in these stages. As we age, we become more set in our physical and vocal ways. Change is still possible, though, and of course, some of our current habits might be effective in maintaining optimal function of our voice and body.
- You may be growing more comfortable with your natural self and relaxing into your full potential. You may have developed breathing or stretching techniques that keep you free and agile. But if you've developed destructive or tension-producing habits, it's at this point that you may begin to encounter stiffness or chronic pain.
- Sometimes we get so busy with jobs and kids and homes and responsibilities that we just move from one task to another without stopping to think about how we're getting there, vocally or physically. Then, we find ourselves tense and exhausted from either inactivity or the wrong kind of exertion. We might hold our bodies in patterns we're not even aware of, patterns that run counter to maintaining effective and healthy presence.
- As we age further, our bones tend to shrink a bit in size and mass. Our muscles may lose some of their strength and flexibility, and our proprioception—our sense of ourselves in space—may alter. We may experience challenges in balance or need to move more slowly to feel confident of where we are in space.
- Our voices age, too. In men, the vocal folds become tighter and thinner, which accounts for the rise in pitch for men in old age. And in women, vocal folds become thicker and looser, hence the lowering of the female voice in old age. Our mucous linings and vocal folds tend to dry out more easily, too, and this can give the voice a hoarse, gravelly quality.

Freeing Yourself from Habitual Tensions

- A lot can happen over a lifetime. But we can cultivate habits that allow us to move and speak with ease. The breath and movement work you will do in this course is designed to help you become aware of patterns in your own body and to gently, mindfully begin to free you from the habitual tensions that don't serve you.
- The first step is to observe yourself. Take a physical inventory, starting at your head and working down. Can you tell where you're holding unnecessary tension? How are you sitting? Is your back supported?
- When you're cooking or driving in your car, become aware of your spine. What's it doing? Are your shoulders hunched over the counter or over the steering wheel? Are you reaching toward the windshield with your chin? Or are your ears over your shoulders?
- Observe yourself when you're in the checkout line or waiting for a table at a restaurant. How are you balancing your weight? Are you balancing evenly between your feet? Or are you standing more on your toes or heels?
- Observe yourself at the computer. What happens when you keep your spine straight and position your keyboard the right distance away?
- What happens when you actually acknowledge the tension in your shoulders, back, or hips and tell yourself to soften? Can you feel any release?

Suggested Reading

Heller and Henkin, *Bodywise*.

Rodenburg, *The Right To Speak*, Part One.

Questions to Consider

1. Closely observe the movement of a small child (age three to seven) for five minutes, without the child knowing. Note the child's posture, his or her weight distribution, and the ease with which he or she moves through space. Listen to the child's vocal production—try to separate it from the child's speech, which may not be fully developed. What can you learn about the natural self from observing a small child?
2. Closely observe the movement of an adult for five minutes without the adult knowing. Note the adult's posture, his or her weight distribution, the ease or lack of ease with which he or she moves, and any holding or gestural patterns. Listen to the adult's vocal production and try to isolate any vocal or speech habits. What can you learn about the habitual self from observing an adult?
3. Are you newly aware of any habitual patterns of your own?

Recovering Your Natural Alignment

Lecture 6

Now that you've started to look at your own habitual self, you've begun to get a more or less objective idea of the way you carry yourself. You're starting to understand where tension in your body and face might lurk and what physical accommodations you might make for perceived inadequacies or for maintaining acceptable gender and status roles. The idea that links all of this together is alignment—how the whole body aligns with itself in various ways. In this lecture, as you explore alignment, you will learn about the basic principles of the Alexander technique.

The Alexander Technique

- More than 100 years ago, a man went to the doctor. He said, “Doctor, I’m an actor. I keep losing my voice, and I don’t know why.” The doctor prescribed two weeks of total voice rest and lots of tea with honey. It worked. By opening night, the man could talk again. But halfway through the performance, the man lost his voice again. He went back to the doctor, and the doctor gave him the same remedy: voice rest and lots of tea with honey.
- At this point, the man realized that while this may be the prescription to *get* well, it wasn’t the prescription for how to *stay* well. And the doctor had nothing else to offer. So, on his own, the man began a process of self-observation. He used mirrors. He listened to himself. He observed his own movement.
- He noticed that whenever he spoke, he’d stiffen his neck and retract his head. He’d feel his throat tighten. He’d feel himself gasping for breath instead of just letting it drop in. And these habits got in the way of his breathing. What he did with his body was causing him to lose his voice. He realized that his physical alignment was the gateway to his breath, voice, and movement.

- This man's name was F. Matthias Alexander. And what he found by observing himself in the mirror has become a technique used by performers, public speakers, athletes, physical therapists, chiropractors, and many others. It is referred to as the Alexander technique. Students of the Alexander technique have included Aldous Huxley, George Bernard Shaw, Julie Andrews, Paul Newman, and many others.
- The first thing Alexander looked at was what he called primary control. That's the relationship between the head, neck, and back. Try to assess your own primary control.
- Stand wherever you are. Your feet should be hip-width apart, with the weight centered evenly between your legs. You're on all four corners of your feet; you're balanced. Let your knees feel soft. Your hips should be free, in line with your legs and spine.
- Bring your attention to your head and neck. The tendency—or habit—is to collapse the upper spine and stiffen the neck by lifting the chin slightly upward. Alexander called this tendency “startle,” and it settles into human beings in the head, neck, and back area.
- By stiffening the neck, we're concentrating the full weight of our head on the smallest part of our spine, which causes our spine to compress. That compression, in turn, causes our bodies to make extra, unnecessary effort, which can create pain or tension anywhere in the back or neck.
- When we release the head and allow it to nod forward slightly—when we bring our ears over our shoulders and allow the back of the neck to lengthen—we feel the rest of the spine lengthen. We feel the shoulders drop and spread.
- As you experiment with this, be careful not to overcompensate in the opposite direction—don't force the chin down farther than it wants to go, because if you do, you'll create neck tension in a different way. This should feel easy and free, never held. Your

head should feel like a ball suspended gently above your spine. As it floats there, think about creating a little more space between each of the vertebrae.



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Breathing exercises can help prepare both your mind and body for a performance.

- Take a minute to just breathe. Do you feel a difference in how your breath enters your body? Go back to the unaligned version, where your head is pulling forward and your shoulders are collapsing. Exaggerate it a little. Do you feel that tension in your neck and shoulders?
- Try breathing in this position. Does the breath enter the body differently? Can you feel that the placement is different? It's a more shallow breath. When you collapse, you block the breath from entering the lower torso, which limits your vocal potential.
- Let's return to our aligned neck and head. The following are some of Alexander's concepts of good use, also known as Alexander's directions. They're steps in releasing physical habits that might be in the way of optimal alignment. We need optimal alignment for optimal stage presence. We need to let go of some habitual ways of standing and sitting that cause us to exert unnecessary tension and effort.
 - Let the neck be free so the head can go forward and up.
 - Let the spine lengthen and the back widen.
 - Now remember your hips. Balanced. Easy. Weight evenly distributed between the legs and on the feet. Neither pressing the hips forward nor tilting them back.

- And breathe. Never forget to breathe.
- It is important to note that freedom is different from relaxation, in that the muscles are still exerting the energy to perform the task, but they aren't overexerting. When we overexert, or over-prepare for a movement, we create strain and tension, which are counter to the confident, centered presence that is in all of us.
- If we're going to clearly communicate our character's purpose, or our own purpose as a speaker, we want a free, supple body. We want a body that's flexible enough to serve the purpose of the character. We want a body that'll be able to do what the script asks it to. If we're rigid and fixed in our own tension patterns, then we have trouble creating the alignment and movement patterns required by our character.
- Feeling freedom and space in the body also helps counter those feelings of stage fright. It sets the body up to get a full breath. That breath stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system, which slows your heart rate and loosens that grip of fear people get when they're in front of an audience.

The Difference between Necessary Energy and Overexertion

- You will need a chair and a cup with your choice of beverage in it for the following exercise. Start in a standing position. Your beverage is on the table in front of you; you could reach it if you were sitting in your chair.
- First, just try sitting in the chair. Observe what happens with your neck and shoulders as you sit down. Are you lifting your chin and dropping your shoulders as you sit? If so, you're creating some unnecessary tension. Stand again. This time, sit down with more awareness. Focus for a moment on your primary control—your head, neck, and spine. Lengthen and widen.
- As you move to the next step, maintain this sense of length, of vertical space between the tailbone and the top of the head.

- Put your fingers on your hip creases.
 - Let your knees bend forward.
 - Focus on hinging at the hips and keeping your neck and back long as you sit down.
 - Let the sit bones guide you into the chair.
- Did you feel a difference in the way you sat down? Hopefully, the mental effort you put toward good use reduced the physical effort of sitting down. Think of how many times you sit in a day. Think of all the exertion you can save by sitting mindfully.
 - Reach for your drink and bring it to your lips as if to drink it. Stop. Without moving the cup, consciously let go of as much tension as you can from your neck, shoulder, and arm. Do you feel the tension melt away? And yet the cup is still there—your muscles are still doing enough to keep it there.
 - This small motion of bringing the cup to your lips requires a certain amount of muscle effort. But it's likely that you brought more effort than necessary to the job. You probably focused more on the end result—having the cup at your mouth—than on the process of using only the necessary effort to get it there. Alexander called this “end-gaining”—focusing on the result of the movement rather than the movement itself.
 - After you released your tension, you most likely used only the effort necessary for the task. You didn't need all that extra muscle effort. Being mindful, focusing on the process rather than the outcome, and using only necessary effort and releasing unnecessary tension are all connected to freedom and release.
 - Tension and strain don't serve us as performers, and they don't serve us in our daily lives. So, even though we're focusing on

aligning the body for better stage presence, you get the most benefit from this work when you apply it to all areas of your life.

- When you're at the computer, reading, or driving, stop and think about whether you really need all the effort you're using. Chances are you don't need it. Alexander called this stopping and thinking before you move "inhibition." He believed that if you pause rather than habitually respond to stimuli, the body has the opportunity to move in the least restrictive way.
- Being mindful with your movement takes time. Movement, effective breath support, voice, and speech are all skills, and learning a skill is a process. If you're just realizing that there's a healthier way to move and speak, then you will have to stop and think before you move at first. You'll have to practice Alexander's concept of inhibition.
- But over time, your new way of doing things will become second nature. And the benefits you can gain—greater energy, more expansive breathing, more ease of movement—are necessary to create an effective presence on stage. In addition, off the stage, you may have the added benefit of an increased sense of well-being, which is worth the conscious investment.
- Let's apply our consciousness as we move to a standing position from a seated one. Return your attention to your spine. If you've lost a little of that newfound space, just remind yourself again to let the head and neck lengthen and the shoulders drop and spread.
- Put your fingers back on your hip creases. With a straight spine, lean forward from the hips, leading with the head. Once you feel your body weight over your feet, press your heels into the floor and come to standing.
 - Long spine. Shoulders down. Back widened.
 - Hinge at the hips and lean forward.

- Feel your body weight over your feet.
- Press your heels and come to standing.
- This probably feels different from the way you usually sit or stand. Hopefully, you're using your mental effort to reduce your physical effort. As you do this, you may feel yourself letting go of habits you've held for a long time. It may feel awkward at first. You may feel exposed or uncomfortable. But you may find less strain and tension in your everyday movement if you can consistently let go of that old way of doing things.
- If you're going to create a character, a character you have to sustain over a series of performances, you'll want to start from this neutral, natural alignment—not one shaped by your own circumstances. Mindfully starting from your natural alignment to create character does two things: It frees you from physical carriage that characterizes you but may not suit the character, and it frees you to create a physical carriage you've imagined from your script analysis.

Suggested Reading

American Society for the Alexander Technique, <http://www.amsatonline.org/>.

MacDonald and Ness, *Secrets of Alexander Technique*.

Questions to Consider

1. Spend a few hours of one day consciously monitoring your movement. As you go through your daily routine, remind yourself of Alexander's concepts of good use. Try to practice them. Consciously let go of as much tension and effort as you possibly can.
2. Think of a few small changes you can consistently make in the way you move. Practice those changes when you are in conversation with or speaking to others.

The Body Balanced at Rest

Lecture 7

The best approach to balance is to work *with* the body, to support its natural and healthy inclination. In this lecture, you will learn how to work with your body to find balance. As you begin to be aware of how your body wants to rest—how your body wants to move—you may find that your body changes for the better. The goal of this lecture is to encourage freedom and balance in your body.

Finding Balance

- Balance is the state of equilibrium that results from an even distribution of weight. It's through this equilibrium, this centered state, that we're able to economize and direct our energy in the most effective ways.
- As performers, we want to economize. We want to direct all our energy toward the important work of pursuing our purpose on stage. It takes energy and focus. If our brains and bodies are tense from strain and self-judgment, our performing energy dissipates, and we're not as effective as we could be.
- The body always compensates for imbalance, consciously or unconsciously. So, when you feel tension in one part of your body—for example, your lower back—pay attention to the opposite muscles to see what role they're playing. You might find that you're underusing your opposite muscles—your abdominals, in this case—and forcing your back to do all the work. This causes compression, and compression causes pain.
- You find balance—you feel it—by constantly exploring and adjusting, sometimes in large ways, sometimes in small. So, first, we're going to balance the body at rest. In performance classes, this is often called floor work. We consciously remove one of the forces that create imbalance: gravity.

- When you can find balance at rest, you can be more present to begin to understand the sensation of it. And once you can feel what it means to be centered on the floor, then we add gravity back in and you're better able to find that center in the vertical plane. After that, we add movement.
- Today, we begin on the floor. You need comfortable clothes for this work, and you might find it helpful to work on a yoga or exercise mat. It is important to remember that if you feel any pain at all, stop what you're doing and adjust. Pain is your body's way of telling you to pull back or realign.
 - Lie down on your back. Close your eyes and find an easy breath—a natural breath. Beginning with your feet, do a scan of your body. Don't try to feel or do anything physically, just notice. As you focus on your feet and then work your way up, be aware. Which muscles and joints feel free and easy? Which areas in the body feel tight or painful? Bring your focus to your back: Which parts of your back are touching the floor? What parts are pulling away?
 - Allow the breath to slow down. Without forcing, increase the length of the exhalation. Breathe in. And out. And in. And out. Keep breathing. Next time, as you inhale, slowly tighten the muscles in your feet and ankles. As you exhale, release them. Let the tension go.



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Doing a scan of your body while lying on the floor can help you locate and focus on areas of tension.

- Repeat what you just did with your feet and ankles, moving up the body and breathing as you go. Start with your calves, and then move to your quadriceps, hamstrings, glutes, inner thighs, abdominals and lower back, chest, shoulder blades, biceps, triceps, and fists.
- Then, tighten the body as a unit. Try to breathe in this position. It should be difficult. Then, let it all go. Now try to breathe. It should be much better. Sometimes we find more freedom after conscious contraction.
- Most of us have some kind of holding pattern, subtle or pronounced, that constricts our breath and movement. These holding patterns can be the sources of generalized strain or anxiety, or they can be the cause of chronic pain. So, releasing them prepares the body—both for fluid, expansive movement and for vocal work.
- Continuing to breathe, draw your knees to your chest. If it feels good on your lower back, do a few small rolls from side to side. Take stock of what you just did. How easy or hard was it to focus on the body for just a few minutes? Did you find your mind wandering, or were you able to direct your attention to each area? Now, release the knees and allow the arms to lengthen upward on either side of your ears. Stretch and yawn out loud. Give your body a gentle shake.

The Feldenkrais Method

- We're going to do a series of small movements to release the shoulders and begin to open the hips. These exercises are from the Feldenkrais method, which is a body-awareness system created by Moshé Feldenkrais that is designed to release subtle holds in the body with gentle movements. We'll focus primarily on the tension hotspots in most people: the connective tissue in the shoulders and the hips. These are tiny movements, but they can make a big difference in your level of physical freedom.
- Lie down on the floor. With both arms in parallel on either side of your head, focus on your right shoulder. Lengthen and lift

the right arm 10 times. Let the movement emanate from the shoulder girdle. Your arm shouldn't come more than an inch or so off the floor. From the shoulder, lift and lower. (Go through 10.)

- Next, add the right leg. Again, this is a small movement and starts in the hip socket. Lifting and lengthening from the hip, raise your right leg an inch or so from the floor while you use your shoulder to lift your right arm. Lift and lower. (Go through 10.)
- Now you can stay where you are, but if you're near a mirror, bring your left arm down and roll to your right side. Then, use your left arm to raise your torso up so that you're on your hip. Then, shift your weight evenly so that you're on your knees, and stand up.
- Go to the mirror and have a look at yourself. Is your right shoulder lower than your left? It is quite possible that it is. Does the side of the body you worked feel any different from your other side? If it does, it's because you used tiny movements to create release in the connective tissue.
- A Feldenkrais practitioner might take you through more repetitions, but hopefully you're beginning to see or feel some effect. If your body responds well to this work, you can increase your repetitions to 20 or 25 on your own.
- But you can't stay lopsided—so make sure you lie back down and do the same set of exercises on your left side. After you do the left side, scan your body again. Do you feel different parts of your back releasing to the floor? How does your back feel now?
- Let's turn our focus to the pelvis. Most of our biggest and strongest muscles are connected to the pelvis: our abdominals, obliques, lumbar, glutes, piriformis, hamstrings, and quadriceps. Often, when we encourage freedom in this area, other parts of the body follow.

- Place your feet on the floor with your knees hip-width apart, pointing toward the ceiling.
- Place your right ankle on top of your left knee. So, if you were to straighten your left leg right now, you'd have an upside-down figure four.
- Flex your right foot to protect your right knee.
- Bring your left knee toward your chest, keeping it bent.
- Guide the outside of your left thigh with your left hand, just below the back of the knee, and reach through the triangle you've made with your legs to guide your inner thigh with your right hand. You should feel a wonderful stretch in your right hip.
- If you'd like to get a deeper stretch, take the hands to the front of your left shin and clasp them just below the knee. You can also deepen by using your right elbow to brace the right knee away from the torso, but be gentle with this and back off if you feel any strain at all in the knee.
- Breathe. See if you can release the leg a little more toward the chest with each exhale.
- Do the same stretch on the other side.
- Place the feet back on the ground with the knees pointing up. The feet should be parallel and the same width apart as your shoulders. The arms are by your sides.
- Very slowly, very gently, begin to rock your pelvis back and forth. Lift it slightly and then release it slightly as you create a small arch in your lower back. Continue to breathe. Remember that these are subtle movements—smooth and continuous, no more than a few inches in either direction. Slowly lift and slowly lower. Keep this motion going.

- Imagine that there's a clock dial painted on the back of your pelvis. Your coccyx is 6 o'clock, and 12 o'clock is at the top of your pelvis, where it joins the spine. Continue to rock back and forth, and imagine that you're going from 12 to 6 and back again. Keep the abdominals relaxed. Breathe.
- As you're moving back and forth, answer these questions for yourself: Where does your body feel pressure against the floor when you move your hips to 12 o'clock? Then, shift back to 6. Where does your body feel the floor when you move to 6 o'clock? What do you feel your hips and feet doing as you move from 6 to 12 and back again?
- Next, begin to fill in the other hours on the clock. Place 3 o'clock in the area of your right hip joint; 9 o'clock will be at your left hip joint. Imagine these four numbers on your clock. Start at 12, and move slowly to 3. And back to 12. And again to 3. Then, float down to 6. And back to 3. Do this a few more times. Feel your way from 6 to 9. Repeat this a few more times. Next, move from 9 back up to 12. Then, trace the circle a few more times.
- Reverse the circle and move around your clock face in the opposite direction: 12, 3, 6, 9.
- Take a moment to check in with the whole body as you work. If any unnecessary muscles have tried to creep in and help where they aren't needed, see if you can release those muscles as you work.
- Begin to feel the hours in between: 12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Are there any areas that feel more difficult to move through than others? What can you do with your breath or your movement to allow the hips just a little more fluidity in those areas? Keep circling. Change directions.

- Finally, extend your feet away from your body until you're lying flat on the floor. Is there any difference in what parts of your body are contacting the floor? Breathe and observe any changes in your body.

A Pose of Constructive Rest

- Draw your knees up and place your feet on the floor again. This time, instead of placing your feet the same distance apart as your hips, let them be slightly farther apart.
- Drop the knees in toward one another so that they're resting against one another at the center line of your body.
- Reach both arms up toward the ceiling and let them cross in front of one another, like you're giving yourself a big hug.
- You may feel the chin reaching again toward the ceiling. If you need to, try putting a thin book or a folded blanket under your head.
- Remember the Alexander cues.
 - Let the neck be free so the head can go up.
 - Let the spine lengthen and the back widen.
 - Breathe. Never forget to breathe.

Suggested Reading

Feldenkrais, *Awareness through Movement*.

Sellers-Young, *Breathing Movement Exploration*, Chap. 2, Explorations 11–17.

Questions to Consider

1. Think about the pelvic clock exercise from the lecture and how you felt afterward. What is the relationship of the pelvic muscles to the muscles of the back and shoulders? What is the relationship to the hamstrings? What does releasing these muscle groups feel like in your body? How might this release affect your movement?
2. As you did these exercises, what happened to your breath? Did you notice any changes in the way you were breathing?

The Body Balanced in Motion

Lecture 8

This lecture moves you from the horizontal plane—which is where you worked in the last lecture, balancing your body at rest—to investigating the vertical plane. You will explore how to direct your energy with economy, fluidity, and grace. Then, you will explore the dynamic alignment of the body in motion. But before you learn about what gives your movement direction and definition, it helps to understand the body in a state of dynamic neutrality.

Dynamic Alignment

- Just the act of standing requires your body to extend energy. By simply standing still, you're feeling the dynamic resistance that gravity provides as you lengthen upward. It's gravity that gives a performer a sense of life.
- Because gravity is always moving through us, you're active and vital even when you're standing still. You have to use certain muscles to stay upright; otherwise, you'd crumple to the ground like a broken marionette.
- The following is a warm-up exercise.
 - Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Inhale and raise both arms overhead. Pretend that you're climbing a ladder. Don't forget to breathe.
 - Put your weight on your left foot and reach up with your right hand to stretch the right side. Then, alternate with the weight on your right foot and the stretch on your left side.
 - Use your whole body, not just your arms. You should feel a nice stretch in your obliques—the muscles in your waist—and in your intercostals—the muscles between the ribs. You also might feel your shoulder blades opening as well.

- Keep breathing. Feel the breath enter your lungs as they expand. Keep climbing. Feel how nice it is to loosen the upper body. Exhale and bring the arms down.
- Inhale and extend your arms fully overhead. Go up on your tiptoes. Energize the whole body, even your fingers.
- Imagine that you're a marionette. Begin to exhale as someone cuts the strings to your fingers. Wrists. Elbows. Head. Upper back. Lower back. Soften the knees, let your torso hang, and fully release the breath.
- Keep inhaling and exhaling. Your head is loose—nod your head “yes” and shake it “no.” Make sure you're not holding the neck.
- Let your spine lengthen toward the floor. Let the hamstrings lengthen. Bend your knees as much as you need to. If you like, you can hold your elbows with your hands to create more weight as you hang.
- Inhale. Feel your breath fill your lower back. Exhale.
- Roll up, keeping the knees bent and starting at the tailbone. Continue to breathe. You have 24 vertebrae. Roll up each one. Exhale.
- Feel your head suspended above your neck. Feel the space between your vertebrae.
- When a marionette is upright, there's a sense of suspension. The marionette sways and bobs as it moves along. It constantly adjusts to forces around it. The strings maintain a sense of vertical space within the figure. Like a marionette, we need to constantly adjust our skeletal and muscular systems in relationship to each other and the environment.

- The dynamic resistance of our tissues keeps our structure moving fluidly. It keeps our bones from compressing in on one another and becoming rigid. When our muscles constrict—from exertion or fear or inactivity—they can obstruct the movement of our skeletal structure. We want our muscles and joints to work together to allow fluidity, bending, extending, rotating, abducting (lifting the leg away from body), or adducting (drawing the leg toward body).
- As you begin to move through space, you'll find that your joints will work most effectively if you spread your energy equally among all the parts of the body that complete a particular movement.

Planes of Movement

- Once you are loose, just stroll around your space at a comfortable pace. In doing so, you are marrying the vertical plane with the sagittal plane—the forward and backward plane. Other planes of movement are the lateral—side to side—and the diagonal.
- As you walk, you first explore these planes with your full body, moving backward or forward, side to side, or on a diagonal. There are all sorts of possibilities and combinations.
- Think about different situations that require you to use different planes: trying to make it across a ledge without falling, walking forward to approach a podium, backing away from an angry dog. If you have chairs in your space, let them dictate your traffic pattern. How does furniture affect the planes you use?
- Let's explore the planes with gesture. Often, when performers use the sagittal plane—the forward and backward plane—they seem to involve or implicate the audience more. Observe the difference between spreading and raising the arms horizontally and starting with the arms out in front of you. The first one feels like “all this is mine” and the second one feels like “all this is yours.”
- What's the difference between using only the vertical plane to wave at someone and involving the horizontal as well? It feels like the

person you're waving at is farther away when you incorporate the horizontal plane.

- Try different ways of pointing. First, use only the forward/back plane, like Uncle Sam. Incorporate the vertical plane by bringing the gesture down from up high. That communicates something different; it feels more accusatory.
- Next, bring the gesture from the horizontal to the sagittal. This says something different again, like you're choosing a certain person. Can you think of other gestures that use multiple planes of movement?
- Using all the planes in performance adds depth to your movement. If you want to create more intimacy with an audience, you can gesture in front of the body. You don't want to close yourself by always having your arms in front of your body, but using this plane is a great way to invite the audience in or connect with another character on stage.

Sitting Positions

- Let's experiment with sitting in different chairs. Take different positions as you sit. Be aware of the planes of movement. Does sidling into a chair feel different than stepping directly to a chair in front of you, turning around, and sitting down? Does popping up out of a chair feel different than standing and moving diagonally? Popping up might communicate that you're startled or that you're excited to volunteer for something. Leaving a chair on the diagonal feels like you're trying to avoid someone or something. You're trying to leave quickly.
- Endow each chair with an identity. For example, one chair becomes a throne, a beach chair, a church pew, the electric chair. Try sitting in each of these different chairs. How does endowing the chair change the way you sit? Does it change the planes you use? Do you have any emotional or physical response to your different chairs?

- These planes of movement give us physical, visual, and emotional variety. They can tell us something about character.
- Because performance is a three-dimensional art form, we need to think three-dimensionally when we perform. Actors, speakers, directors, and designers use these planes of movement constantly. Otherwise, we run the risk of our work looking flat and uninteresting.



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The way you sit in a chair can communicate to your audience the different personalities of different characters.

Analyzing Your Walk

- Let's go back to gravity and look at how weight influences our movement. Walk some more. Become aware of how the weight of your body moves through your foot as you step. Notice the effort you expend, the way your hips swing, and any holding in the pelvis, abdomen, shoulders, neck, or jaw. Gently encourage yourself to release. Keep walking. Keep observing.
- A great way to understand how you transfer your weight through space is to look at an old pair of shoes you have. If some parts of the soles are more worn than others, they can give you clues to how your body is balancing your weight.

- Ideally, your shoe would be worn out evenly, except for the arch. But sometimes we put more weight on the outer edges of our feet, which might tell us we're holding our thighs or arching our lower backs. Conversely, we might put weight on our inner arch, which might tell us we're tightening our knees or inner thighs.
- Experiment with placing your weight on the outer edges of your feet and see how your body compensates. Then, try the inner edges. Do you feel how placing the weight can cause you to hold in subtle ways?
- Of course, a lot of our shoes—especially shoes for women—have slightly raised heels, which pitch our bodies forward. We compensate—remember, we always compensate for imbalance—by leaning backward. This can cause stress on the lower back, and it can also cause a lot of us to wear out our heels first.
- So, if your shoes are especially worn in certain areas, ask yourself what you're doing with your body when you walk. You might be able to make small adjustments that make a big difference in your sense of physical freedom.
- Walk again. Does one part of your body pull the rest of you through space? People, and characters, have different centers of movement. Many of us lead with our heads; some people lead with their chests.
- Can you figure out what you lead with? Try using a mirror. See if you can see yourself in profile out of the corner of your eye. Or get someone else to watch you and tell you what he or she observes.
- Stand still again. Find your dynamic neutrality—your balance. How does that feel? Do you feel any different?
- What if we moved our body through space as a balanced unit? What would that feel like? Try it. Remember our Alexander cues: Let the neck be free so the head can go forward and up. Let the spine lengthen and the back widen.

- Focus on moving one knee forward and shifting your weight to that foot. Try to let the foot make full contact with the floor as you step. Think of the ground as flexible, accepting.
- Go slowly at first. As you place the foot, bring your back knee forward and transfer the weight to that foot. Do this in slow motion until it feels fluid and relaxed.
- The idea is that you're carrying your torso with your legs. No part of your upper body—not your head, not your chest, not your hips—is leading you through the space.
- As you become more comfortable with the way you're using your muscles to move through space, begin to increase your pace until you're at a natural, relaxed walking rhythm—no hurry, but with a sense of fluid energy.
- Does this feel different than the way you usually walk? Does it feel similar? See if you can maintain the space in your torso—long spine, wide back. See if you can maintain the sensation of moving one knee forward and shifting the weight, then bringing the other knee forward. See if you can maintain a sense of breath and softness in the joints.
- You might find that walking this way takes less physical effort. You might find that awareness and simple adjustment of how you move allows you to economize your energy and promotes a sense of freedom in your body. You might find, if you're working from the outside in, that walking in a balanced, confident manner makes you feel more balanced and confident inside.
- Imagine a situation where you might need to walk across a room or stage—you might give a toast at a wedding, perhaps, or walk up to a podium to accept an award. You might walk across a stage to give a speech or make a strong entrance as a character.

- Imagine that you're taking the stage. The body is in balanced alignment. The spine lengthens. The back widens and the shoulders drop. The head moves forward and up. You breathe freely and deeply. You use your legs to carry your torso through the space. You walk confidently, effortlessly, and pleasantly toward your light. When you get there, you'll step into it, and perform.

Suggested Reading

Heller and Henkin, *Bodywise*.

Margolis, "An Introduction to Margolis Method."

Questions to Consider

1. Practice entering a room with the intention to speak to a group of people. Work with a mirror if you'd like. Balance the body before entering and choose a focus. Try to walk in with the torso directly over the legs, moving fluidly and confidently.
2. Once you enter, experiment with using the vertical, horizontal, and sagittal planes with your gestures, first in isolation and then all together. How does gesturing three-dimensionally change how you communicate?

Intent, Purpose, and Character

Lecture 9

Bodies tell stories. The first thing we bring to any stage is our body. So, to do any kind of performance, the first thing a performer has to do is physically show up—he or she has to be present. And there's a difference between just being somewhere and being present. How we use our bodies has a lot to do with the kind of presence we create. The body makes thought visible. It accomplishes tasks. In this lecture, you will learn about how you can shape your movement to tell your stories. You will learn how to consciously, constructively shape your physical effort.

Movement

- How do we move in the real world? How do we move on stage? What are the forces that shape our effort into communication? To answer these questions, we must remember why we move and speak: to satisfy needs, to satisfy our purpose. So, movement is energy shaped by purpose.
- Movement can either be an extension of our inner life (inside out) or an external expression that informs what's going on inside (outside in). It's the quality of the movement that makes our purpose clear, that shapes effort into intention.
- What's movement quality? To answer that question, let's introduce the work of a movement pioneer named Rudolph Laban, who changed the way we think about movement. Laban is most famous for creating a movement language that helps us understand and record movement, kind of in the way composers notate music. Actors, directors, dancers, educators, therapists, and animators often use Laban effort shapes in their work.
- According to Laban, movement quality is determined by effort shape. Usually, when we act or interact, we link together a series of physical actions that together create an effort shape. So, to

understand movement quality, we look at the influences on movement. We look at our attention, which influences our feeling about what we're attending to, and then our feeling influences our intention of what we're going to do—our purpose—and this shows in our physical decisions.

- Another way to look at these four movement influences—attention, feeling, intention, decision—is to look at them as forces that shape our effort.

Attention

- Laban called our attention—the way respond to the world around us—space, which is the “where” of movement. Where are you? Where will you go next? How big is the space you inhabit? Is it the size of a phone booth or a football field?
- He described our use of space as a continuum, with one end being direct—moving from point A to point B with no deviation—and the other end being indirect—moving around aimlessly without focus.
- Let's experiment with space. Imagine that you're walking confidently, directly up to your new boss to shake his or her hand. Nothing's in your way. You move in a straight line. You reach straight through the space to shake his or her hand.
- Next, imagine that you're lost in Grand Central Station. It's crowded. You're wandering through the hustle to find your train. How does this feel different than moving directly to shake someone's hand? Our attention to the task, our level of focus, influences how we move through space.

Feeling

- Laban called our feeling about what we're doing flow, which is the “how” of movement. How do you move and gesture? Flow is also a continuum, with bound flow on one end—movement that's deliberate, contained, controlled—and free flow on the other. Free flow is uncontrolled, careless, spontaneous, and difficult to stop.



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Imagining that you're moving through a crowded Grand Central Station requires more attention and focus than imagining that you're moving in a straight line to shake someone's hand.

- Let's do a little exercise to try to feel the difference between free and bound flow in our own bodies. Try taking off an article of clothing—a hat, a coat, your shoes—with great abandon. Fling things wherever they land.
- Then, put whatever you chose back on and try the same activity with bound flow. Concentrate on continuously moving through your task—no surprise movements. Let one motion flow to the next. Carefully place your clothing in a specific place.
- It feels different. With bound flow, you stop and control your movements. With free flow, you let it all hang out. So, bound or free flow can inform a character or tell you something about how a person perceives the world.

Intention

- Laban called our intention weight, which is the “why” of movement—the level of pressure behind the effort. Weight can be strong: We can force, we can withstand, we can halt something. Or weight can be light: We can tap, we can soothe, we can caress.
- Think about how you use weight. Imagine dragging yourself home after a stressful day at work and falling into your favorite chair. Maybe after a good night’s sleep and a cup of coffee you bound out the door the next day to meet a friend you haven’t seen in years.
- There’s a reason we describe excited people as walking on air or having feet that don’t touch the ground. There’s a lightness to that kind of energy.

Decision

- Time is the “when” of movement. It’s the speed at which we make physical decisions. Time can be sudden—a burst of energy from relative stillness—or it can be sustained—a constant energy with a long duration.
- Time—or lack of it—gives a situation its urgency or unimportance. Time tells us whether we can vacillate or whether we need to act immediately. Time tells us when and how long to move and at what rhythm to move.
- Think about when you’ve had to act quickly from a point of stillness—maybe to keep a vase from breaking or to save a child from running into the street. Do you stop to consider the options? No. You don’t have time for that. You act, and often you act from a point of relative stillness.
- Think about when you’ve sustained an activity over a long period of time, maybe when you’ve hiked up a mountain—or maybe something a little less glorious, like wandering through a store to buy a new computer or a new piece of furniture. Unless there’s a deadline looming, there’s time to consider, wander, and think.

- What about rhythm? How does time change your physical rhythm? Think about times you've been in a rush and the way it affects your rhythm, or when you've had all the time in the world to get to your destination.
- What about cities you've visited? Have you ever noticed a different tempo—a different cultural recognition of time—than where you came from? This might include new speeds of walking, driving, or even talking. Changing rhythm makes us more aware of our own relationship to time.

Eight Basic Effort Shapes

- Laban said that these four forces—space, flow, weight, and time—are the forces behind movement quality. Furthermore, he said that because we often combine these factors, we can use them to create eight basic effort shapes—a movement language.
 - A strong, sudden, direct movement becomes a punch. A light, sudden, direct movement becomes a dab. It's the same movement, just with a different weight behind it.
 - A strong, sustained, direct movement becomes a press. A light, sustained, direct movement becomes a glide.
 - A strong, sudden, indirect movement becomes a slash. A light, sudden, indirect movement becomes a flick.
 - A strong, sustained, indirect movement becomes a wring. A light, sustained, indirect movement becomes a float.
- Sometimes it helps to understand how Laban's effort shapes are related if you look at them in terms of categories. You can see that we have four direct movements versus four indirect movements, four strong movements versus four light movements, and so on.
- With space, our “where,” we have a continuum from direct to indirect. With flow, our “how,” we have bound or free. With weight,

our “why,” we have strong or light. With time, our “when,” we have sustained or sudden.

- Laban said that the eight effort shapes—punch, dab, press, glide, slash, flick, wring, and float—which are intentional or instinctive ways we choose to move, indicate personality and purpose. We often use more than one effort shape at a time. And we use different effort shapes for different scenarios in everyday life. But the effort shapes we typically gravitate toward in our everyday moments can be clues to how we perceive and respond to the world.
- Think of the four sudden, quick effort shapes: the punch, dab, slash, or flick. These shapes imply a conscious or unconscious desire to resolve situations quickly—to get something done, to get it over with or out of the way.
- Conversely, think about the four slow, sustained effort shapes: the press, glide, wring, or float. These shapes tell us that time can be prolonged. They suggest that outcomes can be delayed. Situations can be considered or processed before they draw to a conclusion.
- Laban effort shapes let us explore our physical and psychological relationship with force and compliance, with discipline and freedom. They help us become conscious of our attitudes toward our environment. They help us to understand other people’s motivations. Laban shapes can help us step outside ourselves and create and try on new personas.
- What effort shapes do you typically use? What silent story does your body tell? What story do you want it to tell? Do you move directly through life, with a goal always in mind? Do you punch and press? What would happen if you let yourself float or slash a little?
- Or do you drift from one experience to another, going where the wind blows? Do you float and flick? What would happen if you let

yourself sustain your focus on one project or aspect of life? Do you physically withhold or offer yourself to the world?

Suggested Reading

Adrian, *Actor Training the Laban Way*.

Newlove, *Laban for Actors and Dancers*.

Sellers-Young, *Breathing Movement Exploration*, Chap. 3.

Questions to Consider

1. Observe how you move and gesture in everyday scenarios—in conversation, working at your desk, shopping, or cleaning. What two or three effort shapes do you typically use? What effort shapes do you rarely use?
2. Using two or three effort shapes, create a character that has a different physical life than your own. Create a one-minute scene using the effort shapes you choose.

Playing Status Relationships

Lecture 10

This lecture is about the body in relationship. How do our movements and gestures help us clearly communicate our purpose or our character to other people? Do others perceive us the way we want them to? And how do the movements and gestures of other people influence our perception of them? To answer these questions, this lecture will explore status. The concept of status is an important tool on stage and in life. Think about it as you approach a character, a conversation, or an interview. If you look for them, you'll see status plays everywhere.

Status Play

- We tend to think of status as a general way of being, but in performance and in other kinds of communication, it's helpful to look at status in terms of physical tactics. Anyone can play high or low status at any given time. Age, socioeconomic class, or health can influence a person's standing, but status can be independent of these things.
- Even though we hear a lot about status in business and politics, it isn't always about class or power, and it isn't just a human trait. Status is played out constantly across the whole animal kingdom: Lions, monkeys, dolphins, penguins, geese, and bees are just a few examples of animals that practice social status behaviors. These animals recognize each other, establish hierarchies, and work together in some way, whether it's to procure food, defend their territory, or raise their young.
- For any society to work, it has to have natural laws that keep its members from killing each other. Of course, there are confrontations; animals fight over resources, mates, or pack dominance. And sometimes, there are casualties.



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Social status is an important consideration when determining how you're going to play a character.

- But social animals often resolve conflict by establishing a pecking order. Once they have a pecking order or a status quo there's less fighting—unless someone comes along and tries to change the status quo. So, the quest for status is innate.
- Status transactions go on all the time, across many species. They go on among individuals. They go on among groups. They even go on among societies.
- When it wants to raise its status, an animal physically gets big and takes up space to show power. For example, a gorilla opens its arms and beats its chest. High-status players extend their energy into the space and into those around them.
- The opposite is also true. When it feels powerless, an animal closes up, shrinks from the world, and draws inward. For example, a turtle retracts its head. Of course, sometimes an animal wants to be lower status, maybe to protect itself or to connect with another animal. So, often, it'll expose its vital parts—its neck, underbelly, or reproductive organs—to the dominant animal. For example, wolves expose their bellies. Low-status players either withhold

energy from the space and from those around them, or they offer their energy to be used on another's terms.

- Status is instinctive. We all take power or give it, whether we're wooing someone, interviewing for a job, running for president, or making a sales call. We may not always be aware of it, but we constantly relate with our bodies, our gestures—with our voices, our choice of words. We constantly play status. And, often, the way we do it isn't all that different from the rest of the animal kingdom.

High-Status Movement

- How does status play out in the human body? And how do we use status to define ourselves or our characters? First, let's look at how we increase our status or the status of a character we're playing.
- To increase our status, we do what animals do. We loom large. We take up space. With our stance, for example, we do this by balancing our base, standing with our feet apart so that we won't tip over. We face people with an open body, which says that we have nothing to hide and nothing we need to protect. We remove barriers such as furniture and crossed arms.
- Body language expert Janine Driver calls this "navel intelligence": We face our belly buttons toward the people we like, respect, and believe. To return to our Alexander work, we let the neck be free so that the head can go forward and up. We get bigger by letting the back widen. An aligned head and torso communicates honesty and strength.
- But it's not just about stance and posture; it's also about how we move and how much we move. So, when we play high status, we might keep our heads still when we talk. We might economize our movement so that we're not perceived as erratic. We might stride purposefully through the space. When we sit, we sit openly, with our heads up and our chests exposed. We make consistent eye contact.

- If a high-status player wants to threaten, he or she might stare at a person until the person looks away. If a high-status player wants to reject another person, he or she might turn his or her body away or limit his or her eye contact.
- If a high-status player chooses to gesture, he or she gestures big—the goal is to take up space. Often, when we play high status, we'll gesture and move symmetrically so that we look balanced and confident. But too much symmetry can be boring or make you look like a robot. And too much movement—walking or gesturing—can take away from your message and dissipate your power. In most circumstances, you want physical variety—symmetry balanced by asymmetry, and movement balanced by stillness.
- What about the quality of high-status movement? What effort shapes would communicate high status? Sustained, direct efforts like gliding and pressing tend to smooth our movement out. They allow us to coast directly and confidently through the space.
- We also might punctuate with strong, sudden gestures like a punch or a slash. These shapes can be powerful, as long as they're controlled, or bound. If they're not, we risk looking erratic—like we can't control ourselves. There's some status to be gained in appearing dangerous, but it may not be the kind of power we're looking for.
- Sometimes, when we're playing high status, we touch other people. We pat them on the back, or we put a hand between their shoulder blades and guide them in one direction or another. We might put both hands on their shoulders to steady them so that they can hear something important we have to say. Interestingly, high-status players typically touch with an open hand; a closed-fingered touch can imply uncertainty about the relationship.
- The most universal touch, at least in Western culture, is the handshake. According to body language experts, a neutral handshake is when both people reach straight in—through the

sagittal plane—and clasp their hands side to side. Some high-status players might use a forceful grip—a pressing effort shape—and try to turn, or wring, their partner’s hand so that it’s on the bottom of the handshake.

Low-Status Movement

- Some of us might assume that it’s always best to play high status. There’s a lot of focus on how to appear powerful in professional settings—how to look strong, how to come across as assertive. We’re warned away from the low-status stances or gestures we associate with fear or uncertainty. But if we’re acting, we may be called upon to play a fearful character.
- Someone who plays low status out of insecurity might close off their body by turning away or by creating distance between themselves and another person. They might create barriers between themselves and other people by hiding behind the furniture, their electronic devices, or even their hair or arms.
- In terms of posture, they might collapse their shoulders or bow their heads to withhold themselves from other people. They might close off their stance by clasping their legs together to protect themselves, not realizing that this makes a base that’s easy to topple.
- In terms of gesture, a fearful low-status player might loom little by wrapping their arms around their body instead of letting them hang or expanding them away from the torso. They might try to offset feelings of stress with self-soothing gestures like face touching, neck rubbing, or hand wringing.
- But playing low status isn’t just about fear, and power doesn’t always come from playing high status. Sometimes people don’t want to play high status. They want to appear approachable, receptive, and trustworthy. Sometimes we play low status when we want to draw another person out or broker a compromise.

- In some situations, we might even want to appear submissive. For example, think about when you're pulled over by a policeman. Playing low status in this situation might decrease your chance of getting the maximum penalty.
- People play low status out of fear, but they also play low status out of respect or consideration. Low-status players who play low status without fear build people up. They amuse. They placate. Sometimes they use self-deprecating language and gestures. They agree. They empathize. They follow. And, sometimes, they lead.
- Low-status players might cock their heads to one side while they listen. They might drop their chins slightly when they make eye contact. They might affirm another person's power by nodding or mirroring that person's gestures. And they might make offertory gestures with their hands.
- Low-status players lean in to show interest, but not so close that they make other people uncomfortable. They smile, genuinely. They encourage people to talk. Sometimes they reach out and touch other people, but it's generally in the form of comforting, nonthreatening gestures like gently squeezing someone's hand or touching someone's forearm.
- In terms of movement quality, low-status players might choose lighter effort shapes, such as dabbing or gliding or floating. They might also be more likely to use physical indirection to appear less aggressive.

Status Shifts

- We alter the status we play depending on the circumstances. You might play one status in your personal life and another in your professional life. Or you might exchange one kind of status for another at different times in your life, especially if maintaining a certain status came with a lot of stress.

- Even though status can shift, a lot of us generally play one status most of the time. We're just more comfortable in that particular role. Some people hypothesize that we unconsciously seek to play the same status we had in our family of origin. Or perhaps we seek to play the status we wanted to have in our family of origin. Regardless, we typically gravitate toward one status or another.
- What status do you gravitate toward? Are you aware of how you reflect that status in your posture and gestures? Sometimes, of course, it's necessary to leave our comfort zones and play a status we don't naturally gravitate toward. For example, parents are always expected to play high status with their children, but as children age and gain more independence, sometimes the status shifts. Or we may be expected to play high status in situations where we feel intimidated, like when we're presenting to a board of fellow experts or interviewing for an important job.
- Most of us acknowledge that thoughts can change physical perspective. But research has shown that our physical perspective can also change our thoughts and our body chemistry. This means that maybe before a big entrance or meeting, you might not want to wrap yourself up in your coat and hunch over, checking your smart phone. It also means that even when you don't feel powerful, even when you're feeling low status out of fear or anxiety, you can work outside in to change that.

Suggested Reading

Cuddy, "Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are."

Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Johnstone, *Impro*, "Status."

Questions to Consider

1. Are there settings in your life where you typically play high status? Are there other settings where you play low status? In general, are you comfortable playing high or low status the majority of the time? Why?
2. Think of a character from a play or film that you might like to play. You can use characters from *A Streetcar Named Desire* if you wish. Is your character a high-status player or a low-status player? What physical choices (body positions, effort shapes in movement and gesture, physical rhythm) can you make to appear high status? What physical choices can you make to appear low status?

Stage Movement Savvy

Lecture 11

This final lecture in the movement sequence deals with the body on stage. In this lecture, you will learn about stage savvy: the physical techniques that stage performers use to direct the audience's focus and maintain visual interest. Specifically, you will learn that stage-savvy performers know their purpose for being on stage. Based on their purpose and given circumstances, they use their body to focus audience attention where it needs to go. To maintain visual interest, they use all the potential for variety in their space.

Focus

- You can enhance the clarity of your performance by understanding the principles behind focus and visual variety. Most of us think of focus as placing your undivided attention on something. But in performance, focus is where you want the audience to look and what you want the audience to hear.
- Despite all of our multitasking tendencies, the eyes can only look one place at a time. Often, the ears don't comprehend if the eyes aren't looking. So, part of telling any story on stage is helping the audience know where to look when. You do that by working with focus.
- Performers can either give focus or take focus. They can do this with body positions, body orientation, and movement. Possible body positions are full out, three-quarters open, profile, three-quarters closed, and closed. They communicate different things.
- When you're full out, you're directly relating to the audience. You're acknowledging that it's there. You have nothing to hide. You're open, comfortable, and presentational.

- We often use three-quarters out when we're working on a proscenium stage. It's also known as cheating out. Cheating out at three-quarters open allows visibility to the audience while the actor is also relating to another person on stage.
- Half-closed, or profile, can be used in confrontations or secretive moments and when performers work on a thrust stage or in the round—when the audience is going to be on more than one side. On a proscenium stage where the audience is out front, working in profile can mask half your body, so you want to be aware of that and use this position consciously.
- Essentially, with three-quarters closed or fully closed, the actor has his or her back to the audience. You shouldn't turn your back if you are speaking or if a major plot point hinges on the audience being able to see you in that moment, but in other circumstances, backs can be dramatic and effective, as long as they don't obscure important information.
- It is important to be familiar with stage directions. Upstage is up away from the audience. Downstage is down close to the audience. Stage right and stage left are from the actor's perspective, not the audience's. So, if an actor is standing downstage right, the audience would see him or her on the left side of the stage.
- To give focus, you might orient your body toward the character the audience should focus on, wherever that character is on stage. (This is also known, according to Janine Driver, as using your navel intelligence.)
- Focus is really important when there are lots of people on stage. When one character addresses a crowd of people on stage, it's important that actors in the crowd turn their bodies toward the speaker so that the audience knows to look at the action that's moving the story forward.

- Depending on the situation, you could orient your body position away from the focal character. This happens sometimes when you're sharing focus.
- If your character is the focal point, sometimes you need to take focus on stage. To do this, you can take a power position. Stand straight up, facing full out toward the audience. You can stand at the center of a group, as long as they are staged in a way to highlight you. You can put some space between your body and the other people on stage, so that they're more of a group and you stand alone.
- You can be at the highest point on stage relative to the other actors, or you can be at the lowest point on stage relative to the other actors to take a different kind of focus—for example, if you're playing the subject of an interrogation.
- You also give and take focus by knowing when to move and when to be still. Performers often give focus by being relatively still while another actor speaks or moves. Often, they move less when they listen and more when they speak. They know that it's difficult to for an audience to hear and see what one actor is doing if another actor is moving.
- Performers can take focus by moving while others are still. They can stride purposefully across the stage. They can rise suddenly from their seat. They can raise a glass for a toast or hold a prop up to the light. In addition, they can be still, either after a period of their own consistent movement or when everyone around them is moving.
- Stillness can be just as dramatic as movement. It can reveal character and relationship just as much as movement. So, if there isn't a reason to move on stage, be still. You might cross the stage and be struck still by a particular thought or discovery. You might have to be still while you take in shocking new information. You might stay still while the whole cast bustles or dances around you.

- Another way to take focus is through stage business, which is telling your character's story through the way you handle props, respond to your costume, sit or stand, or enter a room. For example, a character stirring or sipping a drink is stage business. It's an opportunity to use focus to punctuate a line or tie up a thought or illustrate a character choice.
- Finally, if you're taking focus with a cross (meaning walking across the stage), walk in front of your fellow actors. Don't cross behind them, or the audience loses you and what you're saying. It's your focal moment—your chance to shine. Don't obscure yourself by trying to be polite.
- Also, be careful not to upstage your fellow performers. We upstage people when we stand in front of them when they should be the focal point, when we move too much while they're speaking, or when we stand upstage of them and force them to turn away from the audience while they're talking. Allowing focal moments to be in the clear for the audience is a form of theater etiquette. It's also good storytelling.

Visual Interest: Variety

- Directing focus helps keep character action and relationship clear and the audience interested. But there are other tricks performers use to maintain visual interest. The main idea behind visual interest is variety. You can create visual variety by using all the tools available to you on stage—for example, your stage planes (which include line, depth, and height).
- Line, depth, and height correspond to the vertical, lateral, sagittal, and diagonal planes. Just like a painter's canvas or a football field, actors can create a dynamic geometry on stage. Directors think about this all the time, but it helps if a performer understands it, too. For example, we don't often need to be in the same plane as other actors on stage, unless we're trying to create an image of stability or uniformity.

- And it's interesting if some actors are high and some are low, or if some are upstage and some are down. The shape of an onstage group helps the audience know where to focus and tells us something about characters' status in relation to one another.



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The way you move across the stage communicates your character's status in relation to other characters.

- Bodies and scenery create lines and shapes. If you stand vertically near a horizontal surface, you create a nice perpendicular contrast with your horizontal plane. If you lean backward on a table, you create a diagonal line. If you lie on a bed or couch, you reflect the horizontal line of your furniture.
- Diagonal lines are dynamic. They imply excitement. They're the quickest way to create depth and visual interest. And when you're with two or more actors on stage, you can use diagonals to create triangles, which are infinitely more interesting than straight lines. Three or more actors can create tight triangles standing close together, or long triangles with actors standing farther apart. There are many possibilities.
- When you're moving through the space, you might want to try breaking up lines of movement. Of course, the quickest way to get from point A to point B is a straight line, but it's also the most

predictable. What happens if you start going another way, then remember to go another? What happens if you ricochet off a person or a piece of furniture? What happens if you hesitate in the middle of a cross and then decide to go anyway?

- Straight lines are fine for tabernacle choirs or kick lines, where an audience is supposed to look at everyone all at once. But like many aspects of performance, uniformity should be a choice. Focus and status are much better understood through variety.
- So, pay attention to stage geometry. Make it work for you as a performer. In addition, keep in mind that stage is a medium with depth. You can use the full depth of the stage to create three-dimensional moments.
- Challenge yourself to use the whole space—your diagonals and triangles and stage planes. If there's a spot on a set you never go to, try relating to it in rehearsal and see what happens. Downstage is accessible; upstage is mysterious.

Visual Interest: Balance

- Another thing to consider with visual interest is balance. Balance is not the same thing as symmetry. Too much symmetry on stage can get boring—so can too much balance, although audiences tend to like at least some.
- Balance simply means an equal distribution of stage weight. You balance a stage with two people standing at the same distance from the center in the same plane, or you can balance it with one person standing downstage and another standing upstage at a relative equal distance from center.
- You can create balance or imbalance if you pay attention to physical distance on stage. Distance between actors is a powerful tool. How close your character gets to another person says a lot about the relationship. It tells us the level of intimacy or intimidation.

It tells us about deception and barriers. It tells us about belonging or isolation.

- Keep in mind that stage is not like film. Film acting sometimes requires close talking so that actors stay in the camera frame. But on stage, you don't want to be right up in another actor's face for long, or the audience won't be able to see either one of you. You don't have to be especially close to intimidate, seduce, or accuse someone, or perform any number of the tactics that'll help you achieve your objective.
- Finally, you can use physical rhythm to create variety. Like most acting choices, character rhythm will depend on your given circumstances and the action you need to take in the scene. Some characters might be more likely to sit right down and get to the point, while other characters might hem and haw and take more time to make it to their seat. Or characters might travel at different rhythms through the space.
- You can also change your rhythm on stage. If we all went at the same rhythm all the time, it would get pretty boring. Scenes are like dances, with fast parts and slow. It's up to the performer to find the tempo changes.

Suggested Reading

Hodge, *Play Directing*, Chap. 10–13.

Humphrey, *The Art of Making Dances*.

Jory, *Tips*.

Questions to Consider

1. Attend a play of your choosing. Watch it with an awareness of focus and visual interest. Can you spot some of the principles discussed in the lecture in action? Are you aware of how the focus is being directed? Can you see visual variety in the actors' use of space?
2. Apply our stage-savvy principles to your two minutes alone exercise or another scene. Can you find a way to use all of your space? Can you find moments where your physical rhythm changes?

The Glorious Human Voice

Lecture 12

We know why we speak—to meet our needs. But if we want to increase our effectiveness as speakers, we need to understand how we speak. We need to understand all the possibilities available to us. Therefore, this lecture will take you on a guided tour of the vocal mechanism, starting with an overview of how both voice and speech work. There are four stops along the tour: breath, phonation, resonance, and articulation.

Vocal Technique

- Actors learn vocal technique for many reasons. Some of us might be naturally able to access our breath for a full, open sound, but most of us have to work at it. Some of us might have a natural gift for clear speech and effective pacing, but most of us have to train to reach our full potential. Some of us might already have the vocal endurance to do eight shows a week, but most of us need to build up our stamina for those kinds of demands.
- Actors practice vocal technique to increase sound, clarity, and staying power. We learn how to breathe and speak to open up the glorious possibilities of our instrument. We study vocal technique so that we can talk to our audience and fellow performers rather than at them. We study to be heard and understood at all times.
- Your voice is like an aural fingerprint. Like it or not, people infer a lot about others by the sound of their voice and the way they handle speech. Do they sound lost or like they know what they're doing? Do they sound rural or urban? Educated or uneducated? Threatening or kind? Confident or shy?
- It may not be fair, and it may not always be accurate, but people make quick assumptions based on the voice—judgments about intelligence, class, approachability, and even power. So,

being able to speak to your fullest potential allows you to present your best possible self.



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Vocal technique is important for performers of all kinds, including singers, actors, and speakers.

Breath

- The body houses the voice. It has different chambers, each with its own essential job: the head, the nose, the mouth, the neck, the chest, the belly, the pelvis, and the legs and feet that ground us. These chambers work in tandem with one another to produce sound.
- Our first step is to find a grounded stance.
 - Hips and knees soft.
 - Spine extended.
 - Shoulders dropped and spread.
 - Neck lengthened.
 - Head floating.
 - Feel that balance. Feel that suspension and freedom.
 - Do a quick body inventory: Are you holding anywhere that you could let go? If so, gently tell those extra helping muscles that you don't need them right now.
- Our first stop on our vocal mechanism tour is breathing.

- Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest. Breathe in. Do you feel your chest and belly expanding?
- Breathe out. Do you feel your chest and belly contracting?
- Put both hands on your belly. Inhale and see if you can let the breath drop all the way down to where your hands are.
- Let the breath out on an “s,” like you’re gradually letting air out of a balloon. Could you see your hands contracting inward as you exhaled?
- Breathe in again. Can you see your hands moving out with the breath?
- Exhale. Can you feel your lower torso contracting?
- Keep breathing, in and out. Keep feeling that expansion and contraction.
- Take one hand and place it one side of your lower back. As you breathe, continue to feel that expansion and contraction in your back body as well. These are your intercostals, the muscles between your ribs. They allow you to expand your rib cage and take in the air you need. They also help you sustain your breath that so you use it over time instead of blowing it out all at once.
- The hand on your belly is where your diaphragm is. Your diaphragm is a dome-shaped muscle that sits just below your lungs. By filling your lungs with air, you’re indirectly lowering your diaphragm. And this creates more space in the body for breath. Think of this part of your body as your deepest source for sound. To access the voice in all its potential, you drop the breath down into the lower lungs.
- If you only breathe shallowly into your upper chest, you use a lot of effort and only get a small amount of breath. That can lead

to a breathy, unsupported sound. Shallow breath also creates unnecessary tension in the chest and shoulders, which hampers free expression.

- To truly access the voice, we reach down to our centers and take belly breaths. We access a larger amount of breath with a smaller amount of effort. We work deeper, not harder.

Phonation

- What happens after we inhale? How do we use our breath to create sound? That's the next stop on our vocal tour: phonation.
 - Leave one hand on the belly and take the other hand up to your neck. Place your fingers at your throat, just under where the head joins the neck. This is your larynx.
 - Drop your breath back down to your belly and send it up in the form of a hum. Do you feel the vibration?
- What you're feeling is the vibration of your vocal folds. The vocal folds—also known as the vocal cords—are two thin bands of muscle tissue in the larynx. They vibrate when your breath hits them. That's how we get sound. And just like sound waves, your vocal folds vibrate at a lesser frequency when your sound pitch is low and at a greater frequency when your sound pitch is high.
- When you lose your voice, your vocal folds stop vibrating altogether because they're swollen or inflamed, usually from infection or sometimes from overuse. You can just as easily overuse your voice by whispering as you can by screaming. Both will pull on your vocal folds. So, if you ever lose your voice, try to rest it completely. Avoid the temptation to whisper.

Resonation

- The space in your larynx is small—only about the size of the top part of your index finger. So, it only amplifies your sound a little bit. Most sound amplification happens in other chambers of your

body, which are called the resonators. That brings us to our third stop on the tour: resonance.

- Resonation is the amplification of vocalized sound. There are four major chambers in your body where the sound can resonate: the pharynx, the chest, the mouth, and the nose and sinus cavities.
 - Try feeling the sound vibrating in your resonators. Put your hands on your upper chest, on either side of your sternum. Let your breath drop in, and then allow it to contact your vocal folds on a low-pitched “huh” sound. Can you feel the sound vibrating in your chest cavity? Sometimes we call this lower resonance our chest voice.
 - Let’s move on to the pharynx, which is a little tube, only four to six inches long, that goes from the top of your larynx, past the back of your mouth, and reaches to the back of your nasal cavities. Put both hands on either side of your neck and angle your fingers so that they’re holding the base of your head. Switch the vowel to a slightly higher pitched “hah” sound. Do you feel the vibration moving up your neck, toward your sinus passages?
 - Next, bring your fingers to your jaws. Let’s change the vowel again, this time to “hee.” Do feel the sound resonating in your mouth?
 - Drop your hands and close your mouth. Pretend that there’s an egg in your mouth, but keep your lips closed. Try a hum again. Do you feel your lips tickle? That’s the sound resonating in your mouth.
 - Check out your sinus resonators. Put your fingers on either side of your nose. You’re going to say the word “hung” and hold the “ng” sound. Can you feel the sound vibrating in your nose?

- Place your hands on top of your head. Keep the “hee” sound and raise your pitch a bit. Can you feel the sound vibrating out of the top of your head?
- Sometimes we call this a head voice, which often penetrates space more clearly than a chest voice, but it’s underused in our culture today. If we overused our head voices, we’d all sound like Julia Child. So, we need balance, even in resonance.

Articulation

- To make sound, we breathe, phonate, and resonate. We start with a free, open body. Then, we access the breath and send it up through our vocal folds to resonate into space. But speaking is more than just making sound. To truly communicate, we need to be heard, but we also need to be understood. That’s where speech comes in. Speech shapes sound into words. And that’s the final stop on this tour.
- We break our sound up into words with articulation, which is how we position the parts of our mouth to create specific sounds in any language. If language were music, articulation would be the percussion. Your articulators are your facial muscles, lower jaw, lips, teeth, tongue, hard palate, soft palate, and gum ridge. Let’s become more aware of these.
 - First, let’s focus on the lips. Just blow your lips for a second to loosen them up—the way you imitated a car going by when you were little.
 - Pucker your lips and kiss the air. And smile. Do that a few times. Do you feel the lip muscles working?
 - Spread your mouth as wide as you can, as if you’re going to say “ah.”
 - Change the lip position to make the sound “ow.” Do you feel your mouth stretching?

- Bare your teeth like you're snarling: "errrrr." Voice work isn't about vanity; never sacrifice a good lip stretch for beauty. Don't worry—you only do these things in the studio. By the time you get in front of an audience, hopefully you'll have integrated all of these exercises.
- Let's move on to the inside of the mouth.
 - Use your tongue. Feel your lips from the inside. Move on to your bottom teeth and your top teeth.
 - Place your tongue behind your top front teeth and draw it back until you feel the gum ridge. This is called the alveolar ridge. You use it with a number of speech sounds, including the "d," "t," "l," "n," "s," and "sh" sounds.
 - Travel backward with the tongue until you reach the hard area in the roof of your mouth. That's the hard palate.
 - If you go back a little farther, you'll begin to feel a spongier area in the high rear of your mouth. That's your soft palate. You use it in speech, but it also figures in how you place your sound in your mouth.
 - Bring your tongue forward again. Stick it out of your mouth. Lift it up, down, and side to side. Move it once all the way around. Change directions.
- Your tongue is actually a group of muscles that work in conjunction with your teeth and alveolar ridge to form a lot of your speech sounds.
- This type of speech exploration might feel silly, but it's important to be aware of the tools you have available for speech. Effective stage presence involves delivering your lines or speech with clarity and vitality. Just as our movement needs to be clear, so does our speech.

- It's not enough just to know our purpose. We have to clearly represent our purpose by being seen, heard, and understood. The lips, teeth, tongue, hard and soft palates, and gum ridge are the tools that shape and stop the sound.

Suggested Reading

Berry, *Voice and the Actor*.

Rodenburg, *The Right to Speak*.

Questions to Consider

1. Consider the relationship between your impulse to speak and your breath. Does the impulse come before or after the breath? What kind of breath do you take as you prepare to speak? Does the size of your breath correspond to the size of your thought?
2. Observe your breathing patterns in general. Do you tend to take shallow breaths or deep breaths? Does your breath have a rhythm? Do certain situations encourage certain ways of breathing?

Accessing the Breath

Lecture 13

With voice work—whether you're a singer or a speaker—you start with the breath. Even though breathing is instinctive, it's still a complex process. Often, the best way to access free, productive breath is through floor work. In this lecture, you will do some stretches to promote physical freedom and then move on to floor work to access a supported breath. Once you know what a supported breath feels like, then you will begin to explore sound and resonance.

Breathing Warm-Up

- Always start breathing exercises with an aligned body. As you do the following breathing exercises, work within your physical comfort zone. Allow the body to spread and stretch, but don't force it. Physical and vocal freedom comes from the release of tension; force or strain only causes you to constrict, and constriction gets in the way of the natural voice and body. And that will limit your body and voice in your creation of a believable character.
- When we balance our bodies at rest, we let go of holding patterns. This lecture focuses specifically on freeing any holding patterns that



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Breathing exercises can help you access the full potential of your breath.

might be getting in the way of our amazing potential for sound. The goal is to find a sense of physical freedom so that you can fully access the breath. When we remember to breathe—and to breathe constructively—we can perform on stage with the greatest amount of ease and focus.

Breathing Exercise #1

- Take the heels of your hands and put them at your hairline. Slowly drag them down your forehead until they rest gently in your eye sockets. Let any tension in the brow melt away.
- Continue pulling the heels of the hands down the face and stop when your fingertips reach your jaw. Give your jaw a massage. Then, massage your whole face—including your cheeks, nose, brow, temples, and forehead.
- As you massage, think about releasing any facial tension between the brows, with the jaw, in the lips, and even with your tongue. There's no need to furrow the brow, clench the jaw, or park your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Use your face muscles economically, just the way you use your body. Otherwise, they might get in the way of both intention and clear vocal expression when you perform.
- Next, move on to the neck. First, give it a little massage. Massage behind your head at the base of your skull. Then, go all the way down the back of the neck to where it meets the shoulders. We carry a lot of tension in this area, and it's good to allow a little of it to find its way out through our fingers.
- Now it's time for some stretching. Drop the hands by your side. Allow your right ear to drop toward your right shoulder. If you'd like, take your right hand and place it gently on your head with your fingertips almost touching your left ear—do not press. Allow the weight of your hand to stretch the neck. If you'd like to deepen that stretch, you can gently press your left arm down with your left palm parallel to the floor. But don't force it.

- Next, slowly roll your head so that your chin is on your chest. Take both hands and place them gently on the back of the head. The elbows are in front, about eight inches apart. Again, without pressing, allow the weight of the hands to gently stretch the back of the neck.
- Then, slowly lift the head and spread the elbows at the same time. And down again. If you'd like, you can inhale as you spread and exhale as you drop.
- Drop the arms and slowly move your head until your left ear is toward your left shoulder. Repeat the exercise by placing the left hand on the head. Again, if you'd like to deepen the neck stretch, you can gently press your right arm down with your palm parallel to the floor.
- Drop the left hand, drop the head to the center, and gently roll it up until it floats above your neck and shoulders, like a ball on a stick.
- Inhale and lift both arms up. Exhale and drop the right arm; reach with the left hand toward the ceiling. Really lengthen that left side by reaching up first and then leaning to your right. Breathe into the left lung. Feel your intercostal muscles—the ones between your ribs—expand and contract.
- Inhale and lift the right arm up, straighten the body, and exhale while bringing both arms down. Do the same thing on the other side.
- Inhale and lift both arms up. Exhale and drop the left arm. Reach with the right arm, up first and then leaning to the left. Feel the muscles surrounding the right lung expand and contract. Raise the left arm to match the right, and exhale and drop both arms.
- Clasp your hands behind your back and look up, gently opening your chest. Inhale; exhale. Keep the tailbone tucked slightly to protect the lower back. Feel the breath drop into your belly.

- As you continue to breathe, stretch your back. You can do this in two ways. You can do what can be considered a bear hug: Cross your arms in front and press the arms slightly down. Or, if your body needs a deeper stretch, you can do eagle arms—cross your elbows, and if you can, put your hands in a reverse prayer. Then, experiment with lifting the elbows up slightly, or down. These are small, soft movements. Be careful not to strain. Don't forget to breathe.
- Switch the arms and do the same stretch with the other arm on top. Pull back if it feels like too much.
- Next, roll your shoulders—backward first. Start with big circles, and then make smaller ones. Do you feel the difference in the range of motion your shoulders can make?
- Switch directions—forward this time. Make big circles; then, make smaller ones. Reverse your shoulders again.
- Keep your feet on the floor, and bounce just with the knees. Swing your arms and breathe, like a cross-country skier.
- Give yourself a little shake. Soften the knees.
- Inhale and lift both arms up, and then exhale and collapse like a marionette, bending at the waist. If you'd like to add a little weight, you can clasp your elbows. Observe whether you're holding any tension in your neck. If you are, let it go.
- Drop your hands to the floor and bend your knees farther so that your chest is resting on your knees.
- Take your right foot back to a high lunge. Stay there, or drop the knee to stretch the hip flexor—that muscle in the front of your hip. Take the hips back for a hamstring stretch.
- Switch legs. It's important to balance the body when stretching, so you always want to do both sides. If you're lopsided, one side of the

body will always compensate for the other. The goal is to release tension, not create it.

- Move to hands and knees. In yoga, this is called table pose.
- Take the hips back onto the heels for a child's pose. Reach the arms forward on the floor and lift the elbows for the full stretch. Walk the hands to the right diagonal, and then to the left. Then, back to center.
- Use your hands to walk yourself up until you're sitting on your feet or kneeling. Drop to one hip, and bring your feet out from under you and around to the front.
- Roll back. Tuck your knees toward your chest. Roll your body from side to side. Take care to let the neck be free. It should feel like a massage for your lower back. Feel all of your muscles, including the face, neck, shoulders, lower back, and hips.

Breathing Exercise #2

- Lie on your back with your lower legs and calves on a chair or couch and your bottom against the vertical plane of the furniture. You should look like you're sitting, but your back is on the floor.
- Starting at your feet, take a mental tour of your body. Notice—but don't judge—anywhere you still feel a bit of tightness or tension. Pay special attention to your joints—your ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, neck, and jaw.
- Begin to allow these areas to soften, to release. If you're against the couch, gently wag the ankles back and forth and then allow them to rest.
- Lightly press the heels into the seat cushion—only half an inch or so. Feel the knees tense and release.
- Finally, slowly move the knees and ankles back and forth like a windshield wiper, allowing the hip sockets to loosen.

- Keep breathing, and move your attention to your back. Encourage it to spread over the floor. You can do this by applying gentle pressure with your elbows to the floor—just enough to lift the shoulder blades and allow them to move inward toward the spine. Then, rest your back on the floor again. Lengthen the arms away from the shoulders.
- Lift the wrists, shake them gently, and allow them to drop. Feel your back spreading on the floor.
- Imagine lengthening your spine. Picture slightly more space between each vertebra, right down to your tailbone.
- Gently lengthen the neck by imagining the ears drawing away from the shoulders. Be careful not to tuck the chin and cause more tension.
- If you feel any tightness in the lower abdomen or groin, let it go. Don't strain. Allow the back to open, the shoulders to spread, and the neck to release. Let the body be peaceful and free.
- Compare what it feels like to breathe now to what it felt like to breathe at the beginning of this lecture. Notice how much more aware you are when you're lying in this position instead of being upright. With the floor pressing into your back, you feel the intake and exhalation of breath so much more. And you're better able to let go of anything that gets in the way of a strong, clear breath.
- Simply breathe in and out through your nose. This allows you to take a full, deep breath and keeps your vocal cords moist.
- Feel your ribs opening around the sides and back as you breathe. Feel your breath dropping deep into your lungs. Then, through an open throat and mouth, let the breath out gradually and completely. Find the natural breath—don't try to gasp it in or blow it out. When you feel the ribs wanting to move to take in a new breath, allow it to drop in, fill the abdomen, and gradually escape the body.

- Next, begin to focus more on your exhale. You're still allowing the breath to drop low into the ribs and feeling your back and sides expand as the breath fills the lungs. Now, as you breathe out—without forcing—you're going to release the breath in eight counts.
- This time, when you exhale, you're going to add sound by vocally sighing out the breath. You'll start with the "h" sound and use the short "u" vowel—"huh." Putting the "h" in front of the sound activates the exhale before you contact sound and keeps you from clamping in your throat. Inhale, and then exhale with the count of eight. Repeat.
- As you continue, use your hands to feel where the sound is resonating. Touch your chest, throat, mouth, cheeks, forehead, and between your eyes. Feel the sound vibrating. You can begin to experiment with pitch and see how that impacts where the sound resonates.
- Try another vowel this time: "hey." Inhale, and then exhale with the count of eight. Did the new vowel change how the sound resonated?
- Stay on the floor while you add the next layer: speech. Keep feeling the sensation of your back spreading on the floor as you breathe in, and then feel your breath connecting with and sustaining the sound as you speak.
- Doesn't all of the breathing you just did feel good? Doesn't it feel good to wake up the body—to give it some oxygen and allow yourself to follow that basic instinct?

Suggested Reading

Berry, *Voice and the Actor*.

Rodenburg, *The Right to Speak*.

Questions to Consider

1. Find a short piece of text that contains elevated language. It can be a favorite poem, a Shakespearean sonnet, or the continuation of the *Henry V* speech. Continue dropping the breath into the diaphragm. How does it feel to speak with a full breath? Do you find yourself connecting to certain vowels or lines more easily than others? Why?
2. Find a particularly long sentence in your text, one you might break up by taking breaths in between words. Practice accessing and sustaining the breath through the whole sentence.

Your Vocal Energy

Lecture 14

In this lecture, you're going to explore your vocal potential. You're going to investigate what kind of supported sound you might bring to a character or speech. In other words, you're going to play with the supported voice, which means letting go of any preconceived ideas about the way you ought to sound. You're not going to spend mental energy worrying about being "correct" or perfect. You're just going to play and have fun with your voice, finding expression and emphasis in the process.

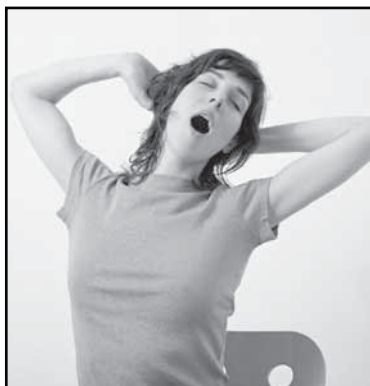
Vocal Warm-Up

- To warm up your vocals, you first have to get yourself centered and loose. Stand up and give your body a little shake. Find your balance—feet shoulder-width apart, spine long, shoulders spread. Breathe.
- Start with a gentle hum. Place your tone where it feels comfortable. Breathe in through your nose and let it out in the form of a hum.
- Repeat. This time, create space in your mouth. Once again, pretend that you have an egg in your mouth, but this time, experiment with a bit more power. Do you feel the sound resonating in your mouth and sinuses?
- Hum again, this time playing with tone. Hum high. Hum low. Sing a little if you'd like. Do you hear all the tones available to you?
- Next, get the body involved. Widen your feet just beyond hip-width apart. Keep your knees soft. Start with your puppet drop. Inhale and lift your arms up, and release to the floor—bending at the waist—on a vocal "ha."
- Just hang there for little bit. Wake up your hamstrings. Let the blood flow to your brain.

- While you're upside down, try another "ha" in your head voice. Can you feel the vibrations in the top of your head?
- Still bending at the waist, begin to swing side to side, with small movements first. Keep the knees soft and supple. Let the weight of your arms guide your movement. The feet can alternate coming off the floor if you'd like.
- Start to build momentum. Exaggerate your swing from side to side; you'll go high, and then low, and then high again. You're drawing a letter "U" with your whole body. Then, add a circle.
- Next, add some sound to your motion. On each swing, give a "ha." Do a long "ha" with your circle. Start with the arms up high to one side and release the sound as you swing.
- Rest. Give yourself another little shake. Do you feel awake now? Bounce in place a little bit. Exaggerate the arms.
- Do a few shoulder rolls to loosen up your shoulders. Change directions. Let the head wobble a bit. Make sure that you're not holding anywhere.
- Make three radically different ugly faces—to stretch the face muscles.
- Massage the face. Massage the jaw. Make a little sound while you do this.
- Take the base of your jaw with both hands. See if you can manipulate your jaw open and closed just with your fingers; don't let your jaw help you in any way. Try to loosen up the jaw as best you can. Add a little sound, such as "ah-yah-yah-yah."
- Keep the jaw open and make the same sound with just your tongue, using your tongue muscles.

- Leave your mouth open and clasp your hands together in front of your chest. You're going to shake the jaw free by pressing your hands together and shaking them. Make some noise while you do this.

- Yawn. You can also stretch if you want to. Use your voice.



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Yawning is a vocal exercise that helps open your throat to access your full sound.

- Lengthen the sound. Can you hear the open sound of your yawn? Yawning frees the throat and allows us to access that full, open sound. It is impossible to hold any tension in the throat when you yawn, so actors, singers, and speakers will often yawn before they perform to remind themselves of what that openness feels like. It also helps you drop your jaw so that more sound can come out.
- Try saying a few lines of text from Shakespeare's *Henry V* (act 1, prologue) on a yawn. You're going to sound larger than life, but don't be alarmed—that's the point.
 - Oh for a muse of fire that would ascend
 - The brightest heaven of invention!
 - A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
 - And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!

Vocalizing Text

- Go to a wall. You just need a bare space that'll hold your weight. Working against a wall is a great option, especially if you're working alone. There are so many things that you can do to access

the breath and open the voice. If you're in a voice class, you can do a lot of what you do on the wall with a partner.

- First, just lean against the wall. Bend your knees so that your full back is against it, sort of like a modified chair pose. Place your hands on your hip creases and lengthen the spine out of the hips. Make sure that the neck stays long; find a focus right at your eye level.
- Just breathe in this position for a moment. See if you can feel the breath dropping in and expanding the rib cage. See if you can feel your back expanding against the wall, just like you did on the floor.
- When you exhale, wait until the body wants to take a breath, naturally, before you inhale again. Don't force it.
- Focus on accessing sound. For example, use the word "hey." Make sure that you have your focus. As you speak, imagine your sound like a laser beam penetrating that focal spot. Go at your own pace and use a tone comfortable to you.
- Allow the breath to drop in naturally: "hey." Keep repeating this word. Keep focusing the sound like a laser beam. Just breathe, stay open, and resonate. Can you feel a connection to your breath? Is your sound penetrating your focus? Let the breath drop in and recite a few lines of the Shakespeare text you used for the yawning exercise.
- How did that feel? Did you feel like your breath was supporting your voice? Were you able to sustain your breath to the end of each phrase? Working against the wall allows you to undergird your alignment so that you can deeply access the breath. If you try this with a partner, you can sit or lean back-to-back and say the text together.
- Another way to play with the wall is to do vocal push-ups. Turn and face the wall. Stand about a foot and a half away, with your hands on the wall at shoulder height and your arms straight. As you inhale, lean toward the wall. As you speak, slowly press yourself

away from the wall. Keep your body straight body, with no bending at the waist.

- First try a “hah” and sustain the sound for a count of 10. Wait until you feel the urge to breathe, and then inhale and lean in to start.
- Did that feel different from when you did the exercise on the floor? We’re playing at sustaining the breath through the phrase. Just like runners train for a marathon, singers and actors train to sustain the voice to make it through long phrases. You don’t always have to push through the end of a line, but sometimes breathing in the middle of a phrase can break up the thought and obscure the meaning.
- Add the text from Shakespeare’s *Henry V* that you recited before to the push-up. Use just the first phrase of your text to begin. Inhale, lean in, and recite. Then, try to do the second phrase on the same breath.
- How did you do? Was it as easy as doing just the first phrase? You might or might not have been able to recite both phrases all in one breath, but it’s fun to try. Voice push-ups are a great way to build your vocal endurance.
- Another way to play with vocalizing the text is to say it with your hands behind your head and your elbows spread. Do the second two lines of the same text with your elbows up and spread. You can really feel your ribcage expand and contract in that position. It’s a great exercise to increase breath awareness.
- You can also use props to play with the voice. Sometimes, when you let go of a preconceived notion of how you ought to speak a piece, you can make discoveries about phrasing, intention, emphasis, and character.
- If we become set in our vocal patterns or character choices too early in a rehearsal process, we can find it difficult to stay in the present moment with our partners—we’re too busy replicating what we

decided to do two weeks ago, even if the rest of the cast has moved on. So, remember to play in your work, just to see where the play takes you.

- Performance is equal parts craft and mystery. So, you intentionally do your research to access your purpose and help you make intentional character choices. But you also digest that research and let it inform your play. And through play, you unintentionally make discoveries—sometimes amazing ones.
- Recite a speech while jumping rope or jogging, for example. Do a monologue while you're tossing a ball back and forth with a partner—or, if you don't have a partner, toss it against the wall. You might make discoveries about releasing sound or which sounds want emphasis.
- By throwing a ball back and forth with a partner while you each speak your lines, you might discover moments where you vocally throw your accusations or attacks at the other person. You might also discover moments where you withhold power from your partner by keeping control of the ball. You might experiment with physical proximity by handing your partner the ball or by holding the ball behind your back and forcing the other character to come and take it.
- Just by playing with the simple prop of a ball in rehearsal, actors can make all kinds of discoveries about vocal emphasis, physical relationships, and status transactions in a scene.
- As an alternative, try blowing bubbles before you rehearse a speech—you'll play while you learn to sustain your breath. Pace the floor and change directions whenever you see a comma in your text. Stop and throw your fist in the air when you see a period. Your body will help you understand how much breath you need for each phrase and when you need to take it.

- We need to use all the tools available to us to explore a speech or play a character, not just our intellect. You can have all the intellectual understanding of a character, plot, or speech in the world, but if you're unable to communicate that understanding to an audience through your voice and body, you're only doing half of the work of performance.

Suggested Reading

The King's Speech, directed by Tom Hooper.

Rodenburg, *The Actor Speaks*.

Questions to Consider

1. Return to the short piece of text you chose from the previous lecture. Read it out loud. Then, read it a second time using only the vowels. Think about letting your breath drop in and connecting it to your sound. Finally, read it once more with vowels and consonants. Do you hear or feel any difference in your breath support and sound?
2. Using some of the suggestions in this lecture, take some time to play with your piece while you speak it. Does playing change the way you connect the breath to the words? Did you make any new discoveries?

Vocal Dynamics—Your Best Voice

Lecture 15

This lecture will explore vocal dynamics: resonance, pitch, and volume. These values color your sound and give your voice its overall quality. They create vocal identity, and they can add depth and interest to a character you're playing. Vocal dynamics are partially determined by heredity and culture. They are also physiological and sociological. But you can cultivate dynamics with awareness and training. You can strengthen your vocal values if you're willing to listen and practice.

Resonance

- Resonance is the placement of sound in your resonators. Some of us use all of our resonators when we speak: We alternate between our head, nasal, pharynx, mouth, and chest cavities. Others naturally gravitate toward one resonator.
- Take a second to do a little resonance on your own.
 - Give yourself a little shake to loosen your body.
 - Shake your hands—up high, down low, and out to the sides.
 - Roll your shoulders, backward and then forward. Don't forget to breathe.
 - Shake your feet—first one leg, and then the other.
 - Do a little jog in place. As you do, drop your head and repeat “huh” several times. This drops your soft palate, the spongy part in the roof of your mouth, and helps you increase your resonance.
 - Make sure that you're balanced, loose, and aligned. You're ready to support and contact the sound.

- Start with a gentle hum, wherever it's comfortable.
- Place that hum up in your head resonator. If you feel your lips tickling, you're doing it right.
- Try to speak in your head voice, using a famous line from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*: "'The time has come,' the walrus said, 'to talk of many things.'" It might feel a little strange, but it's important to know that the head voice is there and available for you.
- Next, try placing the sound in your mask—your sinuses and the front of your face. First, hum into your mask. Then, try the same Lewis Carroll line, placing your resonance in your mask.
- One way to know if you're in your nasal resonators more than you need to be is to pinch your nose shut and speak. With American English, the only sounds that typically resonate in the nasal passages are the "n," "m," and "ng" sounds. So, those sounds should be the only ones where you feel the vibrations in the nose.
- Finally, move into your chest. Remember to support the breath through all of this. Start with a chesty hum. Then, try the same line of text in your chest voice.

Pitch

- The second vocal dynamic is pitch, which is the frequency of sound—or our perception of how high or low a sound is. The human voice has a wide range of pitches, but most of us don't use all the tones we have available. We tend to gravitate toward a habitual pitch.
- When we do alter that pitch, it's because our brain sends a message telling our vocal folds to tighten or relax, and that changes our frequency of our vibrations. A lot of the time, we digest the pitch norms of our native language and culture.

- Just as singers have a natural range that makes them a soprano, an alto, a bass, or a tenor, speakers have a natural center—an effortless pitch that they find when every part of their voice works together—the breath, the physical support, and the resonance of the sound. This is also known as an optimal pitch.



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Pitch is our perception of how high or low a sound is.

- Our optimal pitch changes as we age, with women's voices going lower and men's voices beginning to rise after about age 60. Often, though, women—especially younger women—will speak at a habitual pitch that's a few notes higher than their optimal pitch.
- Explore all the keys on your vocal keyboard—your vocal range. Start in the middle, where most people are comfortable. Do a gentle version of a not-so-gentle sound: a siren.
 - Let the breath drop in just like with any other kind of vocalizing, and start at the lower end of your midrange. Vocalize through all of your pitches up to the higher end of your midrange, and then go back down again.
 - Repeat this exercise, and each time you do it, expand your pitch range. To do that, each time start a little lower than before and go a little higher. Try to go from your very lowest pitch to your very highest. Try to hit every pitch in between. However, this should not be painful, so explore, but don't push.

- Say the whole Lewis Carroll line using as much pitch variety as you can: “‘The time has come,’ the walrus said, ‘to talk of many things: Of shoes and ships—and sealing wax—of cabbages and kings.’”
- Now that you’re warmed up, you might want to play with finding your pitch center. You can experiment with finding your optimal pitch by using a keyboard or voice recorder or by asking a trusted friend. Using a keyboard, start speaking at what you perceive as your optimal pitch—where your voice feels most supported and comfortable. As you do, try to match your speaking voice to a key on the keyboard. Be careful not to force your voice into a desired pitch when it’s not in the limits of your natural range.
- If you’re playing a character that’s older or younger than you are, you might want to do a little pitch research. You can listen to people who actually are your character’s age and choose a pitch center for the character that syncs up with the typical habitual pitch for a person that age.
- Whether or not our optimal pitch is the same as our habitual pitch, we don’t just sit at one pitch all day and speak in a monotone, in real life or when we play a character. We change pitch levels—both within sentences and within words.
- We call this inflection. We do it to reflect meaning and add variety. Changes in pitch can be subtle, but there are two basic inflections that most English speakers use: the upward inflection or the downward inflection.
- The upward inflection is when you move from a lower pitch to a higher pitch. We use upward inflection for many different purposes, including to stress important words or syllables, with yes or no questions, to connect words in a list, with dependent clauses, and to express uncertainty.

- In recent years—in the United States, at least—upward inflection, or upspeak, has been on the rise. It can be in the form of a tag question at the end of a sentence, such as “isn’t it?” and “right?” Be conscious of upward inflection. It’s not all bad, but it can undermine your authority. And that may not be what you want to communicate in certain scenarios.
- When we move from a higher pitch to a lower pitch, we’re using downward inflection. We use downward inflection to give commands or convey authority; when we’re asking who, what, where, when, and why questions; and to end conversations and tie up lists.
- English allows for a great deal of pitch flexibility. Pitch variation can significantly change the meaning of a phrase. Pitch also expresses physical and emotional states. Pitch often rises when a person is nervous or angry; pitch can also flatten out when a person is depressed or exhausted.
- Most societies have characteristic pitch patterns—rhythms of inflection, sequences of rising and falling. This is called intonation, and we see it across all languages. It’s especially important in languages like Chinese, where the same word can have multiple meanings just based on how it’s intoned.
- Sometimes we change intonation based on our listener. When we speak publicly, as much as possible we want to base ourselves in the place where we can make our sound with the most richness and ease. We want pitch variety, both for intelligibility and interest. We can achieve that by using our upward and downward inflections in typical ways and by moving beyond our habitual range of pitches.

Volume

- The third vocal value is volume, which is a sound’s intensity—where it falls on the continuum from soft to loud. Our physical distance from other people influences how loudly or softly we

speak, and so do our culture and our level of familiarity with our listeners.

- In the 1960s, social anthropologist Edward Hall categorized four spaces of human interaction that influence our body language and voices: intimate space, or whispering distance, where people are only a few inches apart; personal space, where people are at an arm's length from one another; social space, where people are 10 to 12 feet away; and public space, where people are more than 12 feet away.
- In performance, we're particularly concerned with being heard in public spaces in all their variety. However, with stage acting, we're also concerned with creating the appearance of intimate and personal spaces for a public audience. So, our volume needs nuance and adjustment depending on the situation. We never want an audience to have to strain to hear us, and we never want to strain to be heard.
- How do you achieve this? Often, in theater and public speaking, you'll hear the direction to project your voice. Projecting is the skill of supporting the voice in order to place your sound at a desired distance.
- To project, the first thing you need is effective breath support—aligning and relaxing your body to access a deep belly breath. The louder the sound you need to make, the more breath support you need.
- The second thing you need for projection is a relaxed, open throat. You experienced an open throat when you vocalized on your yawn and then spoke on the edge of it in Lecture 14.
- Third, you need to smoothly connect the breath to sound. You worked on this with connecting your breath with your vocal folds as you sustained different vowels.

- Finally, you need a relaxed jaw that will let all that wonderful sound out. You have worked on loosening the jaw as well.
- To project effectively, you need one other thing: focus. You need to be able to focus and send your sound into the space. To focus your sound, you need to use the mental focus side of your performance triangle.
- With your breath support, open throat, resonance, and relaxed jaw, you visualize your sound arching out into space. You take in all the corners of your space and imagine your sound contacting not just the audience, but also the walls around the audience. Sometimes, it helps to first choose a spot in the back of the room—something at eye level—and aim your sound toward it like a laser beam. Then, you can shift your sound focus to cover the whole space.
- If you're in dialogue with someone on stage, you can speak intimately while at the same time filling the space with your breath and energy. Remember the body positions from Lecture 11: Often, actors cheat out so that they can connect with their scene partner and fill the space. Sometimes, cheating out is necessary for visual and vocal clarity.
- When you're performing, you want variety with volume, just like you do with pitch. If you say everything at equal intensity, you lose meaning and clarity. So, find the loud and soft moments in your material. And don't always equate louder volume with more dramatic power; often, lowering your volume at a key moment can be a powerful choice.
- We also use volume to create emphasis as well as variety. Most of the time, when we emphasize a word or syllable, we speak it at a slightly higher pitch and volume than other words or sounds. Emphasizing the wrong syllable in a word, or the wrong word in a sentence, muddies the word's, or sentence's, meaning. The opposite is also true: You can emphasize certain words within a sentence to make its meaning clearer.

- These are the operative words, which give a sentence meaning. In general, we tend to stress nouns, verbs, adjectives, and certain pronouns. Sometimes, we stress particular interrogative words. We don't typically stress filler words—articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, or helping words. When you highlight words in a sentence, you want to soften the filler words and punch the words that give the sentence its meaning.

Suggested Reading

Karpf, *The Human Voice*.

Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice*.

Questions to Consider

1. Where does your voice typically resonate? Do you use all of your resonators, or do you favor one or two? Do you speak at a habitual pitch? If so, is your habitual pitch where you'd like it to be?
2. Take your short piece of text from the last two lectures. With a pencil, circle the operative words and put a light line through the filler words. Now read the speech out loud, emphasizing the operative words and deemphasizing the filler words. Read it again with an awareness of pitch and inflection.

Clear, Energized Speech

Lecture 16

Speech is the process of carving sound into meaningful communication. And being able to communicate with skill is important, both in sharing your own ideas and in fully appreciating the work of others. In this lecture, you will explore the tools that make speech clear and energized. You will learn about vowels first, and then you will learn about consonants. Each offers an actor different challenges. Clear speech doesn't happen easily or quickly—it takes practice.

Speech Clarity

- What is clear speech? Isn't it just a matter of enunciating, or pronouncing, words? If we articulate all of our sounds, we can have clear speech. But be careful because over-enunciating can just as easily draw attention to itself as under-enunciating can. When people are listening to how we speak, they're not listening to what we're saying. And what we're saying—our purpose—is the most important part.
- Speech isn't just about technical clarity, even though that's important. It's also about delivering your intention and communicating your purpose.
- Technically, clear speech is the effective use of your facial muscles to place and balance your vowels and consonants. The greater your awareness of the muscular energy contained in different words and sounds, the greater chance you have at using length, stress, and weight to carry your intention. Some of the adjustments you can make are very small, but they can make a big difference in the vitality of your speech.

Vowels

- In English, there are two basic ways of making sounds: vowels and consonants. Vowels are always voiced and open. We have to vibrate

our vocal folds to produce vowels and then open our mouths to let them out. That makes them the perfect vehicle to explore breath and resonance, which is what we start with in voice study after releasing our habitual holdings and tensions.

- Vowels carry your sound. They carry the feeling behind the words. Not all vowel sounds are created equal. Vowels have different colors and gradations, depending on how you shape your lips and the way you hold your tongue. And you use different levels of muscular tension to make different vowels.
- Different vowels can carry different feelings. You also hold some vowels longer than others, depending on where they are in a word and whether or not they're stressed.
- In English, there are 20 vowel sounds. We break these up into two basic kinds: pure vowels and diphthongs. Most voice specialists divide the vowels into 12 pure sounds and 8 diphthongs.
- Pure vowels happen when you make one sound and your mouth stays in the same position. An example of a pure vowel is the sound "EE." We make some pure vowels in the front of our mouths, some in the middle, and some in the back. In the front of our mouths, we make the following sounds.
 - "EE," as in "neat" and "clean"
 - "e," as in "redhead"
 - "i," as in "quick fix "
 - "a," as in "cat" or "after"
- These front vowels feel a little brighter than the vowels we make farther back in our mouths. They pierce the space more readily, and we can say them more quickly than other sounds.

- In the middle of our mouths, we make the “er” sound, as in “learn” or “fur.” We also make the “uh,” or schwa, sound, as in “the mother tongue.” The mouth feels tighter on the “er” sound than it does on the “uh” sound.
- Finally, we have the back vowels, which are as follows.
 - “Ah,” as in “father”
 - “Uh,” as in “cut above”
 - “Aw,” as in “taught”
 - “oo,” as in “good book”
 - “OO,” as in “noodles”
- As we close our lips over the “oo” and “OO” sounds, it feels like the sound is moving forward, even though we’re vibrating it in the back of our mouths.
- A diphthong happens when you squish two sounds together and change the shape of your mouth while you’re making the sound. The 8 diphthongs are as follows.
 - The long “I” sound, as in “high tide,” which is two pure vowels blended together: “ah” and “ee”
 - The long “A,” which is the blend of “e” and “EE,” or “Ay,” as in “play”
 - The “oi” sound, as in the word “joy”—a blend of the schwa and “EE” vowels
 - The “ow” sound, a blend of “ah” and “OO,” as in “brown cow”
 - The long “O” sound, which is the schwa and “OO” together, or “uh-OO,” as in “oak” or “gold”

- The “ear” sound—the “EE” and “UR” sounds, as in “appear”
- The “air” sound, which is “ee” and “ER,” as in “chair”
- The “OO-er” sound, which is the “OO” and “er” sounds, as in “tour” or “pure”
- Some speech teachers add another diphthong we call the liquid “u,” which combines a “y” sound with an “OO” sound, as in “dyuke” or “tyune.” But that depends on how you want to pronounce these words.
- In English, there are a few triphthongs, where we make three sounds in quick succession—sounds like “ayer” in “player” or “ire” in “fire.”
- It is important that we know the difference between pure vowels and diphthongs because sometimes we substitute one for the other without knowing it, and that can muddy our speech. Just as we have habitual ways of moving, we have habitual ways of speaking. So, if you become aware of your own speech habits, they, too, can become a choice. You can choose to use the speech habit or not.
- Plus, understanding how you make a sound gives you the choice to hold it or clip it if you want to connect sound and meaning.
- Finally, when you consistently use a pure vowel in place of a diphthong, or vice versa, you get speech patterns and dialects.

Consonants

- Vowels are the emotion of speech because they carry pitch and resonance. Vowels carry the feeling, but consonants carry the meaning. Consonants make sense of sound. Consonants are the logic of speech.

- A consonant is a sound where your breath or tone is halted or partially halted by your articulators: the jaw, lips, teeth, tongue, gum ridge, and soft palate.
- A consonant that completely stops the sound and then releases it—kind of like a small explosion—is called a plosive. Sounds like “puh,” “buh,” “t,” “duh,” “ch,” “juh,” “k,” and “guh” are plosives. Hitting your plosives increases the energy of your speech.
- Consonants that only partially stop the sound are called continuants. Sounds like “m,” “n,” “l,” “f,” “v,” “r,” “s,” “y,” “w,” “z,” and “ng” are continuants because there’s no definite end to them. You can make those sounds for as long as you have the breath.
- Many speech teachers will break down the continuant consonants into subgroups like nasal continuants, laterals, fricatives, and glides. But just know that there are certain consonants that continue the sound. And, like plosives, they can carry the meaning of the words.
- Plosives and continuants are important because as a speaker, it’s good to know which consonants you naturally hold and which ones you naturally punch. For example, holding a continuing sound at the beginning of the word is a way to create emphasis.
- In addition to being a plosive or a continuant, a consonant can be voiced or voiceless. A voiced consonant shapes your sound while your vocal folds are still vibrating. For example, B (“buh”), D (“duh”), and V (“vvvv”) are all examples of voiced consonants.
- Voiceless consonants, on the other hand, shape the sound with only the breath. For example, p (“puh”), t (“tuh”), and f (“ffff”) are voiceless consonants.
- Think of voiced consonants as sounds that you can’t whisper and voiceless consonants as sounds that you can whisper.

- If you're not clearly hitting your consonants, or if you're using voiceless consonants in place of voiced ones, people may not be able to understand you. You might not be getting everything you can out of your language.
- Voiced consonants often carry the sound farther than voiceless ones. Voiced consonants also take just a little longer to say than voiceless consonants, especially if they're continuants. So, you want to try to voice the consonants that are supposed to be voiced.
- Which consonants are voiced and which ones are voiceless? A good way to remember a lot of them is in pairs. We call these cognates. Your mouth makes the same shape, but you voice one sound and not the other. So, p ("puh") is the voiceless version of B ("buh"). Your lips do the same thing with each sound. And t ("tuh") is the voiceless version of D ("duh"). You can feel your tongue on your gum ridge for both sounds. And k ("kuh"), which we make with our soft palate, is the voiceless version of G ("guh"). Then, we also have the s ("sss") and Z sounds ("zzzzz") and the f ("fff") and V sounds ("vvvv").
- We also have a few pairs of voiced and voiceless blends. A blend is two consonant sounds put together. The English language has tons of them, and a few of them correspond with each other.
- For example, with the T-H sound, we have "th" as in "thin" and "Th" (voiced) as in "then." With the S-H sound, you get "shhh" as in "show" and "Zh" (voiced) as in "treasure." We have the C-H sound, as in "chair," and its voiced cousin, the "J" sound, as in "jam." We also have the voiced W, "wonder," and its corresponding blend, the "wh" as in "why."
- Just as with singular consonants, sometimes speakers will substitute voiceless blends for voiced ones, and vice versa, and that can lead to unclear speech.

- There are some consonants that we always voice: L, M, N, the “ng” sound, and Y. There are no voiceless equivalents to these.
- To make vowels and consonants work for you, start with awareness. Start by looking at words and text not only for meaning, but also for sound. Read a text you’re working on out loud using only the vowels. What sounds jump out at you? What happens if you go back and read the words again, but emphasize those vowels with length or volume? You can do the same thing with consonants.
- After you try isolating the vowels and consonants, go back and read your text naturally again. Acting students often find that they’re able to communicate new weight and emphasis just by being aware of the sounds in the language.
- Sometimes, they even discover the meaning of a text with a clearer understanding of sound. Look at your text and see what vowels seem like they want to be held. Read them out loud and try holding them just a bit longer than you usually do. Read a passage out loud and exaggerate all of your starting and ending consonants. Then, read it again and think about making the consonants shine just a little bit.
- It may help you to work with a pencil. Some performers even used colored pencils to differentiate the sounds they’re working with. Circle the consonants you want to punch or hold; underline the vowels you want to emphasize. Sometimes, we refer to this as scoring the text.
- You can practice with a tape recorder if you’d like—you might find that you sound natural when you think you sound overblown and exaggerated, or you may find that you’re working too hard to hit all of your sounds precisely and that you need to pull back a bit.
- As you work on your text, enjoy and savor the sounds of your language. Look for the meaning in the sounds. Exaggerate them

as you explore. Don't worry about sounding silly; it's easy to pull back if you need to.

Suggested Reading

Berry, *Voice and the Actor*.

Lessac, *The Use and Training of the Human Voice*.

Wells, *The Articulate Voice*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you find some vowels or consonants easier to produce than others? Are there any speech sounds you find challenging? If so, can you isolate which speech mechanisms you are either underusing or overusing?
2. Are you using your voiced and voiceless consonants appropriately? If you're substituting one for another, how does making the appropriate adjustment affect the clarity of your speech?

The Muscles of Speech

Lecture 17

Speech is a muscular activity, so you have to strengthen the muscles—of the mouth and tongue—with consistent exercise, just the way you would if you were training for a triathlon. In this lecture, you will give all of your articulators a good workout. But before you hit the speech machines, you will do a warm-up to center the breath and release tension. Then, you will do some speech drills, which are designed to stretch and strengthen the muscles you use in shaping words. Finally, you will experiment with a few tongue twisters and some especially delicious speech passages.

Warm-Up

- To find your center, start with your feet hip-width apart. Shake out your arms. Inhale. Raise your arms. Exhale, drop your torso, and hang. Keep your knees soft. Shake out your shoulders. Shake your head yes and no—with no holding in the neck. Breathe. Feel the breath filling your rib cage as you inhale.
- Roll up, starting at the base of your spine. Stack each vertebra on the next, like you're rebuilding yourself from the waist up.
- Reach up and massage the shoulders, starting at the outward end of your collarbones and working your way inward toward the neck. Pay special attention to where the neck meets the shoulders. Work your way up the back of your neck to the base of your skull. Once you're there, rest your fingers behind your head with your middle fingers touching.
- Spread the elbows, inhale, and look up. Exhale and drop the head. Bring the elbows close in front of you. You can try to let them touch, but don't force it. Repeat that a few times.

- Drop your hands by your sides and slowly roll your head from side to side. Inhale and raise your arms up again. Stretch and yawn. Stretch to one side, and then the other. Open those muscles between the ribs. Open the throat.
- Drop the arms and roll the shoulders—first backward, and then forward. Clasp your hands behind your back and lift them slightly to open up the chest. Breathe.
- Let go and shake the arms out again. Take stock of your body. Let go of any tension in the knees, hips, shoulders, and jaw. You should feel fluid and loose.
- Now it's time to warm up the voice. Start with a gentle hum in the middle of your range. Try a low pitch—feel the sound vibrating in your chest. Pretend to hold an egg in your mouth and try a middle pitch—feel the sound vibrating in your mouth and sinuses.
- Start low and move through your pitches to your head voice and back. Keep humming and start to chew your hum. You're waking up the muscles of the face now—the muscles of speech.
- Stop chewing and massage the sides of your face and jaw. Massage in front of your ears, behind your ears, under your ears, and along your jawbone. Keep breathing.
- Expand your facial massage to include your lips, cheeks, and sinuses. Move your fingers upward between your eyes and massage your forehead, gradually working out toward your temples. Stay at your temples for a moment. Then, put your palms on either side of your face and drag them downward, opening the jaw as you go. Your face should feel warm and relaxed.
- Now let's do some facial stretches. Open your eyes and mouth like you're spreading out your face, like you're really surprised. Then, pucker your lips, scrunch your nose, and close your eyes, like you

just tasted a sour lemon. Alternate between these two faces before releasing.

- Pucker your lips and kiss the air. Then, do your best impression of the Cheshire Cat—a big wide smile. Alternate between these two faces. Then, put your lips together and move them over to the left side of your face, and then to the right side of your face. Alternate between these two faces.
- Finally, let's borrow a face stretch from Arthur Lessac, who wrote *The Use and Training of the Human Voice*. He called this the inverted megaphone. Spread out your face again as much as you can; pretend like you're saying "Ow" and bring the lips forward. Repeat this stretch a few times.
- Lessac encouraged speakers to stretch their lips forward to increase the resonance in their mouths for better clarity. In addition, reaching the lips forward for vowels like "ur," "oh," "oo," and "OO" sharpens those vowels.
- It's time for some tongue calisthenics. With your tongue inside your mouth, make a circle around your teeth like you're trying to count them. Then, switch directions and count the other way.
- Take your tongue to the roof of your mouth and gently move it forward, over your palate, over your gum ridge and upper teeth, past your bottom teeth, and down to the floor of your mouth. Let it travel back in the opposite direction. Repeat this a few times.
- Hook the front of your tongue behind your lower front teeth. Open your mouth, drop your jaw, and move your tongue in and out of your mouth from the back—sort of like you're making a "yah" sound, only you're not moving your jaw.
- To work your soft palate, drop the jaw and whisper the word "kah." Don't move the jaw. Repeat this a few times.

- Stick your tongue out and bring it in. Do this a few times. Keep breathing. Try to touch your right ear with your tongue. Try to touch your left ear. Try to touch your chin. Finally, try to touch your nose—being able to actually do this is genetic. Make a big, wet circle with your tongue outside your mouth. Switch directions.

Vocal Drills

- Time for some drills. We'll start with initial consonants and different vowels. We'll move from voiceless to voiced with each sound and work our way through all the consonants.
- Don't forget to reach forward with your lips as your mouth closes off the vowels. And don't forget to breathe. The first drill is to say the following lines out loud.
 - Tee, too, tee, too
 - Tay, too, tay, too
 - Tee, tay, tah, toh, too
- Repeat this same pattern, but this time with the letter D, instead of T, at the beginning of each sound. Then, repeat this again with the letters P, B, K, G, F, V, H, M, N, L, W, S, and Z. You can also do this exercise with blends like TH and SH and CH.



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Vocal drills help stretch and strengthen the muscles used for speech.

- We'll cover blends with the following exercise. Say the following out loud two times.
 - Lilly, lahlly, loolly, lawlly
- Now add some blends to that. Say each of the following once, starting with the voiceless version of the sounds and moving sequentially to the voiced versions. You can do this exercise with all sorts of consonants and consonant blends.
 - Thilly, thahlly, thoolly, thawlly (voiceless)
 - Thilly, thahlly, thoolly, thawlly (voiced)
 - Shilly, shahlly, shoolly, shawlly (voiceless)
 - Shilly, shahlly, shoolly, shawlly (voiced)
 - Chilly, chahlly, choolly, chawlly (voiceless)
 - Jilly, jahllly, joolly, jawlly (voiced)
- We just worked beginning consonants; now let's focus on ending consonants. Let's try this exercise from Cicely Berry's *Voice and the Actor*. You will be given a series of words to repeat that have the same vowel sound, but they end in different consonants. Connect the breath with your vowels and try to differentiate your voiced ending consonants from your voiceless ending consonants. Remember that your continuant voiced sounds take just a little longer than your plosives.
 - Heart, hard, harm, harms
 - Hat, had, hand, hands
 - Leak, leaf, lead
 - Leads, leave, leaves
 - Set, said, self, selves

- Rate, raid, rain, range, ranged
- Girth, gird, girl, girls
- Now let's look at some words where people often substitute voiceless consonants for voiced ones. For example, with the first word, some people say "loathh" (voiceless) rather than "loathe" (voiced). Try pronouncing the words in the following list. (It's just a partial list, but look for those same sound substitutions in similar words.)
 - Loathe
 - These
 - Please
 - Plead
 - Divide
 - Blades
 - Plays
 - Bathe
 - Baptize
 - Realize
 - Implies
 - Withered
 - Love

- Let's clean up a few more areas. Often, we put a "ch" or "j" sound after the ending consonants t and d. So, "meet you" becomes "meet choo" and "can't you" becomes "can't chew" and "would you" sounds like "wood jyou." Try this exercise and try to maintain clarity between the "t" or "d" sound and the "y" sound that comes after it.
 - Meet you
 - Send you
 - Can't you
 - Did you
 - Taunt you
 - Provide you
- Another common substitution is making a hard "g" sound with "-ing" endings. For example, "king" sounds like "kingk." Try enjoying the "ng" sound on the following words, rather than using that hard "g."
 - King
 - Sing
 - String
 - Fling
 - Thing
 - Zing
 - Singing
 - Pinging

- Ringing
- There is another substitution cleanup that is dedicated to Southerners, some of whom like to substitute the short “i” sound for the short “e” sound. For example, a Southerner might say “I mint to tell thim to git tin blue pins from the tint” instead of “I meant to tell them to get ten blue pens from the tent.” If you make this substitution and would like another option, do this drill.
 - Get
 - Let
 - Set
 - Pet
 - Pen
 - Ten
 - Men
 - Rent
 - Tent
 - Friend
 - Them
 - Then
 - Sentence
 - Dentist
 - Invent

- Accent
- Now try some articulation phrases. For this exercise, you want to exaggerate the vowel and consonant sounds. Eventually, how much you enunciate will depend on your performance conditions, but for now, really use your lips and tongue to form the words. Repeat the following phrases.
 - The painted pomp of pleasure's proud parade.
 - Didn't you enjoy the rich shrimp salad?
 - A proper cup of coffee in a proper copper coffee cup.
 - The weary wanderer wondered whether winsome Winifred would weep.

Tongue Twisters and Speech Passages

- Try the following tongue twister.
 - Red leather, yellow leather. Red leather, yellow leather. (Repeat.)
- The following should help you remember your articulators.
 - The lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue. The lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue. (Repeat.)
- Next, try saying, "Oil spoils doilies" five times fast.
- The following is a staple of acting classes.
 - The big black bug bled blue-black blood, but the big blue bug bled blue.
- Of course, everyone is familiar with Peter Piper. Even though "peppers" ends in an "s," the rule in speech is that the "s" becomes voiced if it follows a voiced consonant. So, we want to hear that "z" sound in "peppers."
 - "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

- A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked.
- If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
- Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?"
- Let's end this lecture with two of the granddaddies of speech exercises. This one comes to us courtesy of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*. Don't forget to enjoy your consonants.
 - "To sit in solemn silence on a dull, dark dock
 - In a pestilential prison with a life-long lock
 - Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock
 - From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block."
- And this one has been around for a long time, but it's still widely used. This might take some practice.
 - "Give me the gift of a grip-top sock,
 - A clip drape shipshape tip-top sock.
 - Not your spinslick slapstick slipshod stock,
 - But a plastic, elastic grip-top sock.
 - None of your fantastic slack swap slop
 - From a slap dash flash cash haberdash shop.
 - Not a knick knack knitlock knockneed knickerbocker sock
 - With a mock-shot blob-mottled trick-ticker top clock.
 - Not a supersheet seersucker rucksack sock,

- Not a spot-speckled frog-freckled cheap sheik's sock
- Off a hodge-podge moss-blotched scotch-botched block.
- Nothing slipshod drip drop flip flop or glip glop
- Tip me to a tip top grip top sock.”

Suggested Reading

Bareither, *Tongue Twisters, Rhymes and Songs to Improve Your English Pronunciation*.

Skinner, *Speak with Distinction*.

Questions to Consider

1. Consider your important interactions and public moments over the past year. Can you isolate three instances when a speech warm-up might have helped you communicate more effectively?
2. Imagine future occasions that may require you to speak with clarity and focus. How can you use the tools of breath and speech to confidently prepare for performance?

Vocal Color—Pacing and Phrasing

Lecture 18

Engaging performance comes from clarity and rhythm. Your purpose, movement, and speech have to be clear. But clarity isn't enough. You also need movement. What keeps an audience engaged is the way the performer navigates through the action. And this navigation has a lot to do with rhythm. Like music, performance has rhythm. In this lecture, you will explore the rhythm of speech—how it's created and how we adjust it. Specifically, you will learn about pace and phrasing and the impact they have on speech.

Speech Rhythm

- Speech rhythm plays an enormous role in acting and public speaking—and in communication in general. We use rhythm to assess a person's dynamism or competence. We use it to gauge hesitancy or uncertainty. We use rhythm in jokes and banter, meetings and presentations, and plays and speeches.
- We create speech rhythm with pace, phrasing, and cadence. Pace is how slowly or quickly you speak. Phrasing is how you group words and pauses—and also how you punctuate your speech with breath and sound. Cadence is pitch variation.



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Speech rhythm is affected by numerous factors, including family, geography, and culture.

- Just as with music, speech rhythm can be regular or irregular, fast or slow, driving or halting, or lilting or straight. It all depends on your material and the personal gifts and habits you bring to speaking.
- We typically learn the rhythm of our language in the first few years of our lives from the adults who raise us. And geography and culture play a part in shaping our rhythm. In different parts of the world, rhythm of interaction varies.
- In the United States, different regions of the country have different rhythmic norms. Whether it's in theater or real life, family, geography, and culture play a part in shaping our rhythm.
- So does social context. We change our rhythm to fit different settings, whether it's conscious or not. Is your setting personal or professional? Is it public or private? Is it deadline-driven or open-ended? Are you among friends or strangers? All of this makes a difference in your speaking rhythm. You may have to consider your words carefully, or you might be able to speak off the cuff.
- Your purpose and context influence your rhythm. And there are neurological and physiological influences as well. Diagnosed conditions, including cerebral palsy, autism, dyslexia, and muscular dystrophy, can affect the way we process thought into words.
- In addition, diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, attention deficits, self-regulation issues, and language disorders can affect the speech process. The good news is that speakers who struggle with processing can make huge strides with proper therapy and accommodations.
- Finally, semantics can affect our speech rhythm. Different subjects or texts have different levels of linguistic difficulty. Language can be dense or sparse. People make different word choices. You can choose short words that you can say quickly or words with lots of syllables, which take longer.

- Also, we slow down for operatives because they carry the meaning. The filler words are like quick little bridges in between those longer operatives. A speech with lots of operatives might have a slower rhythm; a speech with lots of short words might move a little faster.
- Many factors influence our speech rhythm. And while we can't always control our background or our neurology, we can make some choices about the words we choose and how we want our language to move. We can control our pace and phrasing.

Pace

- Pace is how quickly or slowly you speak. We typically measure pace in words per minute. And if we take silence and semantics into consideration, we can create a general guideline of an optimal English-speaking pace at somewhere between 140 and 175 words per minute.
- However, typical speaking pace varies from culture to culture and from situation to situation. When you speak at a faster pace, you demand more of your audience. The audience has to work to keep up with you, which can be helpful in some instances. But if your pace becomes too fast, as it often can when you're nervous, the audience might not be able to keep up. So, if you feel your heart pounding before you begin to speak, breathe deeply and remind yourself to take it slow.
- Going at a slower pace than the cultural norm can engage an audience—and sometimes even surprise them. And a change in pace can equal a change in character. Sometimes we slow our pace for effect. Sometimes we need to slow our pace to accommodate our audience or to allow for the acoustics of a room. But be judicious about going too slowly: Constantly giving information at a slower rate than your audience can absorb can be as deadly to a performance as constantly going too fast.
- The pace you choose depends on your material. Comedy typically thrives on a quick pace, because the action needs to stay one step

ahead of the audience. But comedy isn't just about pace—timing is important for jokes, laughs, and gimmicks. Urgency also dictates a faster speaking pace. With any kind of driving speech, it's important to find the balance between speed and clarity. One of the best ways to keep a quick passage clear is to really use your consonants.

- Poetry and language pieces often need a slower—but still energized—pace, because the semantics are more dense and colorful. And often the language is unfamiliar to a modern audience's ear. When you do this kind of material at the pace it requires, it's even more important to access your full, constructive breath and connect it to a clear, energized sound. It's also important to sustain your breath to the end of each thought in the text. Your breath energy will help maintain the dramatic tension.
- You may need less physical movement when you work on pieces where the language is more complex. You don't have to stand there like an ice sculpture, but too much movement and gesture takes attention away from your words.
- Finally, pace needs variety. If you deliver everything at the same speed, you lose nuance and clarity. And without those, there's no communication.

Phrasing

- Your phrasing, or the amount of space—or silence—between your words or groups of words, is just as important as the words themselves. Phrasing often comes in subtle gradations. Too much space between your words, and you obscure the meaning by breaking up the thought. Too little space, and you lose the meaning by railroading through the language.
- Punctuation can tell you a lot about phrasing, even if you're not working with written text. English speakers tend to pause where the punctuation marks would go, even if they aren't reading or saying lines. And most of us even go one step further: We differentiate between different kinds of punctuation with the length of our

pauses. For example, a comma gets a half beat. A period gets a full beat. A question mark gets a full beat and a rise in pitch. A period or question mark at the end of an idea or paragraph gets about a beat and a half.

- Punctuation focuses our meaning, whether it's on the page or on the stage. It differentiates our pauses. And the pause is a powerful tool in all its variety. It carries nuance. Think of all the things you can suggest with a pause: thoughtfulness, ambivalence, a need to gather yourself before you can continue, sensitivity to how the words you're about to say will be received, or a transition from one thought to another.
- Real speech is full of pauses. Stage speech needs them, too. So, phrasing is important. Too many pauses, or too many misplaced pauses, are deadly to energy and meaning. Performers need to choose their pauses carefully. They need to build a regular rhythm with lines leading up to a pause so that the pause becomes an interruption, a change in the rhythm.
- The kind of rhythm you build and where you choose to pause have everything to do with the intent of your speech or scene. So, look to your text for clues about pace and phrasing. What does the language tell you? Is it choppy and to the point, or colorful and filled with adverbs? Choose your pauses carefully. And once you choose to pause, commit to it and enjoy it. But don't take too many.

Assessing and Improving Pace and Phrasing

- If you're not working with a coach, the best way to evaluate your pace and phrasing is to try recording yourself in both conversational and public speaking situations, and then assess what you hear. And record yourself more than once. Realize that you may be surprised at what you hear. That's natural—you never sound exactly the way you imagine yourself. But you can make adjustments
- You might find that you're using less variety in your speaking speed than you thought. If so, choose a few different kinds of

texts—maybe a written speech and maybe a conversational scene or transcription. Try an exercise called walking your text. As you breathe and speak, walk in one direction. Change your walking direction every time you see a comma. Every time you see a period, throw your fist in the air. Physicalizing those punctuational pauses can help you break up a repetitive speaking pattern.

- You can also learn to extend the sounds that are meant to be extended: your vowels and your continuant consonants. Physicalizing the text in this way can help you connect with greater vocal energy.
- Conversely, you might hear that your pace plods along and the meaning of what you're saying is getting lost. If so, examine your text or conversation for the main idea. You may be taking too many beats for punctuation, and you might need to tighten it up a bit.
- Look at which sentences convey similar ideas and connect them together by maintaining your pace. Challenge yourself to use your breath to drive the energy through your speech. As an exercise, see what happens if you do your speech and pause only after every five or six sentences.
- For either of these issues, if you're working with text, get out a pencil. Underline your periods. Circle your commas. Make notes where you need to pause. If you have really long phrases, make notes where you need to breathe. As you think about where to pause and breathe, see if your ideas align with the overall purpose of your speech.
- A common habit for American speakers is falling off the ends of sentences. This is so partly because we end a lot of our communication with a downward inflection. We start out with a bang and just let our sentences trail off until we can barely hear them. If you hear yourself falling off your sentences like this, think about taking a deep belly breath before you speak. Then, sustain

that breath through the end of your line. Support all of your sound. And don't forget to use your consonants.

- Some people do the opposite: They warm their way into a sentence, so their listeners miss the first few words. If you mumble the beginnings of your lines, remind yourself to breathe and attack those first few words with both your breath and your consonants.
- You might find that you're punctuating your language with more incidental sounds than you realized—sounds like “um,” “mmm,” “ah,” throat clearing, or nervous laughing or sighing. You might be peppering your conversation with phrases like “actually,” “you know,” “as a matter of fact,” and “let me tell you something.”
- We all use some of these sounds and phrases for many different reasons: to hold the conversational floor—to keep a listener's attention until we finish our thought—to fill an uncomfortable silence, to make transitions, and to drive our points home. But repeated unconscious use of incidental sounds and phrases can develop into vocal ticks, which can muddy your meaning and distract your listeners.
- With a little awareness, all of these habits are possible to adjust. Just like our vocal and body habits, we have our own rhythm and pacing habits. When you understand your own way of speaking, you can start to make conscious choices about yourself and about other ways of speaking to support a character you want to play.

Suggested Reading

Iyer, “In Praise of the Humble Comma.”

Wells, *The Articulate Voice*, Chap. 6.

Questions to Consider

1. Record yourself reading your two-minute speech, and in a typical conversation. What can you observe about the pace of your speech? Is your pace culturally specific? Does it vary depending on the occasion or audience? Does it change based on your mood or attitude?
2. Do you perceive any vocal tics or habits in your speech that get in the way of communicating clearly? Are you speaking the first words of sentences with a supported breath? Are you sustaining the breath through the ends of your ideas? Are there any fillers or speech habits that get in the way of meaning?

Accents and Dialects

Lecture 19

In this lecture, you are going to learn about dialects and accents. Even if you just want to be able to tell a joke better, or tell a story from your travels, or place that customer service voice on the phone, dialects and accents are a fun way to explore all of the colors of speech. They're also a fun way to learn a little bit about a culture that is different from your own.

Dialects versus Accents

- These days, people use the words “dialect” and “accent” interchangeably, but to the performer, there's a difference. Simply put, an accent is how someone pronounces a nonnative language. In performance, we reserve the word “accent” for a nonnative speaker of English.
- A dialect is a variation of a native language—a collection of speech habits of native speakers from one particular culture or region. It's a dialect because of regional differences in grammar, vocabulary, syllabic stress, inflection, and rhythm. There are variations within dialects, but generally dialects tend to be more uniform than accents, because accents can have more mispronunciations or various mistakes in inflection, rhythm, or grammar.
- In the United States, for example, someone might speak with a Midwestern dialect or a Northeastern or Southern dialect. In the United Kingdom, a person might speak with an English, Welsh, Scottish, or Irish dialect. With any dialect or accent, there will be lots of variations within these broader contexts. And accents and dialects change over time.
- We need a baseline for discussion, even though experts have trouble pinning down exactly what standard speech is. So, we'll use Standard American English as the neutral point. Standard American isn't necessarily the standard we all need to aspire to, but it's a

good middle ground for comparing different ways of speaking. It's the dialect you hear most with American broadcasters and actors, and it's estimated that about 90 million people speak it, both in the United States and other places.

- To create and maintain a convincing accent or dialect—or to smooth out a dialect you already have—the very first thing you need to do is hear the standard of speech you're going for and examine what you hear. When you prepare to imitate a way of speaking that's different from yours, listen and look for speech factors including resonance, rhythm, inflection, phrasing, vowels, consonants, and the muscles used to produce sound.
- Once you've really listened, then you can begin to create a dialect or an accent. And just like many aspects of performance, it's a step-by-step process. First, you need to place your voice where it needs to resonate. Next, you need to substitute certain vowels and consonants for other ones. Then, you need to find the intonation of your new pattern—the inflections. Finally, you need to understand its rhythm.

Placement

- When you're creating a new speech pattern, you start with muscularity and resonance. You look at how the mouth needs to move and where you need to place the sound to get the vocal quality you want. If you can get your mouth in a position to place the sound, then you have the physical shape for the vowel and consonant substitutions the dialect or accent requires. Sometimes we refer to this as sound placement.
- What we want to know is where in the resonators a speaker of a particular dialect or accent locates the majority of his or her sounds. We also look at how the muscles of the mouth and face shape the sound.
- For example, a General American dialect involves making a lot of sounds in the middle of the mouth, and the jaws and lips are fairly

relaxed. A Midwestern dialect places a lot of vowels toward the back of the soft palate near the sinuses. The teeth in the back part of the mouth are more closed, and the corners of the lips don't move a lot. A New York dialect places the sound in the front of the mouth.

Substitution

- If you can place your resonance, then you're set to make the sound substitutions your dialect or accent needs. When you create an overall change in speech, you consistently substitute certain vowels and consonants for others—or you might drop sounds altogether.
- American dialects can be thought of as different combinations of the universal sounds of English. But not all languages have equivalent sounds. Some of the sounds in English don't exist in other languages. And when a nonnative speaker doesn't have the equivalent sound in his or her own language, he or she will either drop the sound entirely or approximate it with the closest sound he or she has.
- Uta Hagen reminds us that nonnative speakers don't try to speak with an accent; they speak the new language as best they can, but they use the sound habits of the old one.
- So, if you're ever called upon to play a character with an accent, remember that that character is doing the best he or she can with English, given the native sound habits he or she grew up with. If you're aware of what the sound habits of the native language are, then you can begin incorporating those sounds as substitutions in English.
- An example of a sound that doesn't appear in all languages is the "th" sound. It actually only exists in European languages on the western periphery of the continent. So, French and German speakers don't have it. In a French accent, the voiced and voiceless "th" become a "z" and an "s," respectively: "I sink zay tohked about zis and zat." A German would substitute "dz" and "ts" for the "th" sounds: "I tsink dzere are many tsinks to do."

- Of course, there are sounds in other languages that are not in English. Think about the clicking noises in certain African languages, for example.

Intonation

- After placement and sound substitution, we have intonation, or how you arrange and stress your pitches. What kind of music does an accent make? Where are the stresses? Does the pitch rise and then fall, or fall and then rise? Some dialects and accents slide and glide the pitch, such as Southern, Spanish, or Caribbean. Other examples would be the intonation patterns of dialects in the United Kingdom.
- In some parts of the world, pitch patterns are straighter—the languages have more equally stressed pitches and rhythms than in General American or British Isle dialects. For example, some Middle Eastern languages have very even, equally stressed pitch patterns. This is found in parts of East Asia, too.
- Speakers from these parts of the world who come to an English-speaking country might lay their native intonations and rhythms over the English. And when you combine that intonation with placement and substitution, then you get the accent.
- If you are trying to reduce an accent, it might be helpful to consciously listen to the intonations of General American speech and then try using a similar pitch variety in your own speech.
- American English has a lot of phonetic irregularity. We don't speak all of our words exactly how they're spelled. English has a lot of randomly stressed syllables that just can't be pinned to a rule—the speaker just has to know them. And, often, the only way to know them is to memorize them.

Rhythm

- Finally, we have rhythm, which is your pace and phrasing. Certain dialects and accents might be slower than your own pace, and some might be faster. Speakers from some parts of the world—including

those from the Northeastern United States—might barrel through their language. Other people, such as those from the Southern United States, might pause a lot.

- With a dialect, we get regional variety in grammar and word choice. In the United States, we get “y’all,” “you guys,” “y’uns,” and “youse,” depending on where we live. Many people eat sandwiches and subs, but others eat hoagies, heroes, footlongs, and po’boys.
- There are many factors that influence the way we speak, or the way we want to speak. Dialect expert David Alan Stern estimates that about 20 percent of performers have a natural ear for dialects and accents. The rest of us have to work at them. We learn the resonance and muscularity. We study the specific sound substitutions. We try to find native speakers of the dialect or accent we’re working on and watch them to see how much they move their mouths and lips. We listen to recordings of native speakers and try to get the sound of the dialect or accent in our ears and minds.
- We also take the first Uta Hagen question—the “Who am I?” question—and relate it to speech. For example, what’s the character’s social background? What’s the level of education? If the character is a nonnative speaker, what are the sounds and placement of their native language? How and in what country did they learn English?
- How old were they when they learned? This tells us how thick an accent needs to be. Learning a language before or around age 12 seems to be the dividing line of how pronounced an accent will be. Completely eliminating an accent as an adult is very challenging, but nonnative speakers can reduce an accent with awareness, training, and lots of practice, preferably with native speakers.
- Regardless of whether we’re trying to learn an accent or reduce one, the process is similar. We first learn the resonation and sound substitutions—the mechanics of the dialect or accent. We learn the mechanics of the standard we’re working toward. Then, we drill it

with lines and phrases and lyrics until it becomes second nature. We practice out loud, we record ourselves, and then we practice some more.

- Some dialect experts recommend reading from a children's primary book and working on the lilt and substitutions of that accent until you have it down.
- Finally, we try to improvise. If we can improvise authentically in the speech style we've chosen, we know we've created a voice that we can perform effectively.
- There is a speech tool that is especially helpful in learning dialects and accents, but you can also use it on any text you may be working on. If you're a visual learner, or if you need written reminders when you work on speech patterns or just on vowels and consonants, you might want to learn the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is a universal system of symbols used by actors, singers, speech pathologists, linguists, translators, foreign language teachers, and anyone else who studies pronunciation.
- As of 2005, there are 107 letters to represent vowels and consonant sounds in the IPA. And then there are a number of accent symbols that represent glides and sound coloration. But you can improve your speech if you can understand and use just the symbols for vowels and consonants.
- You might want to check out the IPA if you find dialects and accents especially interesting. For some people, the symbols can be a strong visual reinforcement of the sounds they're trying to make.

Tips for Creating or Reducing Accents and Dialects

- Whether you're imitating someone else or using your own voice, you need to connect the voice with your breath. Some dialects and accents might have a breathier connection than others, but no matter what, don't forget to breathe and support the voice.

- Think of your new way of speaking as the outcome of a process that involves the steps of placement, substitution, intonation, and rhythm. Try to get the sounds in your ear in an organic way by studying the resonance and muscularity first; then, tackle the technical aspects of vowels, consonants, and inflection.
- Clarity is more important than authenticity. It's a performer's job to communicate. If an accent is accurate but unintelligible, the performer isn't doing his or her job. An actor needs to be clear.
- Never become so focused on the way you're speaking that you forget your purpose for being on stage: to be present in your scenes. The accent or dialect should be practiced until it feels like second nature—until you don't have to think about it.
- Good speech should never call attention to itself. We want clarity, but we don't want over-enunciation. So, while we exaggerate in practice, we need to digest our speech work and adjust it for the space we're in and the audience we're with.

Suggested Reading

Herman and Shallet, *American Dialects*.

Herman and Shallet, *Foreign Dialects*.

International Phonetic Association Website, <http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/index.html>.

Stern, *Acting with an Accent*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you have an accent or dialect? Can you pinpoint where you locate the majority of your vowel sounds? Are you aware of how you use your speech muscles to produce your own particular sound?
2. Is there an accent or dialect you would especially like to learn? The techniques and resources from this lecture can help you learn or reduce an accent or dialect.

Acing the Audition

Lecture 20

The principles you have studied will enrich your life whether or not you choose to perform, but the next four lectures will explore how to synthesize what you've learned for the moments when you have to step up in front of people and deliver your best self. You will learn about the performance process step by step. This lecture will cover how to get on stage in the first place—through the audition. And you can apply the principles of auditioning to the art of interviewing.

Auditioning

- An audition requires us to develop the character we all need to know how to play: our best self. We may be auditioning for a role that's different from who we are, and we may even need to arrive at an audition in character, but at some point in the process, we'll need to present ourselves in the best possible light.
- To do that, first, focus on what's in your immediate control. When you audition or interview, there's a lot under your control. But some aspects of an audition or interview are not in your control, so you shouldn't waste energy worrying about them.
- In an audition, the following are not in your control: your age, your physical type, whether the other people in the room think you're talented, whether you physically "match" with other actors already cast, whether your skills are too much like another person who is already hired, and whether an insider—a spouse, a family member, a friend, a junior employee—is up for the same role or job.
- By the time you get to an audition or interview, certain decisions have been made. Sometimes, casting has been partially decided. Sometimes, it's not about you or your talent; it's about whether you fit in the given framework of the project.



When you audition, you want to present the best version of yourself.

- However, there's plenty that's in your control to concern yourself with. What's in your control is cultivating and bringing your best self to the audition. What's in your control is your audition persona, which is the most confident, well-prepared, relaxed version of yourself you can present—your best self.
- There many ways you can cultivate your best self. Not so coincidentally, many of them coincide with what you've learned in this course up to now. You can cultivate your self-awareness, connect with your purpose, and rehearse your role.

Cultivate Your Self-Awareness

- To cultivate your self-awareness, you take stock of your strengths and weaknesses. You assess who you are—your age, your physical type, your special abilities, the characters you're comfortable playing, or the responsibilities you're comfortable taking on. You improve where you can, but you also want to be realistic about what you have to offer.

- Once you honestly assess your strengths, then you choose material that showcases you at your best. Are you better at drama or comedy? Are you more like a matinee idol or the boy or girl next door? Can you speak with authority on certain subjects but not on others? Could you convincingly play someone's mom or dad? Can you play a king, a thug, a young lover?
- Choose material that fits you. If your material is your personal or professional history, shape it so that it presents you in your best light. If you do more than one thing well, find multiple pieces that showcase all you can do.
- Most actors ought to have, at the very least, four monologues they can do at the drop of a hat to show their range. Most general auditions call for two contrasting pieces, usually a minute long each. So, make sure you have more than one trick up your sleeve.
- Finally, choose monologues where your character actively seeks something from another character. Most performers showcase themselves best when they're pursuing a clear objective. If you choose to do a story or memory piece, make sure you know who your character is talking to and what he or she wants from that person—because even though you're doing a monologue, you still need to talk to a specifically imagined person.

Connect with Your Purpose

- Once you've taken stock of yourself and chosen your material, it's time to connect with your purpose. Find out about the project you're auditioning for. If it's a play, read it. If it's a musical, listen to a recording of the music. Get the material ahead of time. Go to the audition before your appointed time to look over the sides, which are the scenes being used for the audition.
- Most often in an audition you'll be asked to do a monologue or read a scene. A monologue is a solo piece and needs to be memorized. A scene needs to be prepared, but it's not advisable to memorize a scene because there are so many variables, including different

actors you might read with and different directorial interpretations. So, with a scene, you can and should carry the script, but know it well enough to look up and interact with your partner.

- For either one, assess your objective—know your obstacles and tactics. Know your character's given circumstances. What's at stake? Why is the scene important? What does the character want from the other character in the scene? How will he or she get it? What happens if he or she doesn't get it? The more you know, the less scary the audition becomes.
- Also, remind yourself of your overall purpose in attending an audition or interview. Your purpose is to do your best and enjoy the experience, regardless of whether you're right for the job. Do the audition for its own sake. You really never know where it could lead.

Rehearse Your Role

- After you choose your material and do your homework, you move on to rehearsing your role. Your role doesn't begin when you start your scene or monologue; your role begins with the first contact you make with the company you're auditioning for. So, rehearse and present your best self from the beginning. Make sure you sound friendly and professional on a phone call; make sure you look friendly and put together from the moment you step out of your car. And rehearse your audition from start to finish.
- The structure of an audition can be broken down into six basic parts, each an important part of the audition.
 1. Your entrance
 2. Your introduction
 3. Your transition
 4. Your monologue or scene

5. Your moment(s) after

6. Your exit

- The entrance is the moment you walk into the room. Take the stage and stand your ground. You want to exude confidence and warmth when you walk in, no matter how nervous you are. Make eye contact with the auditors. Move to center stage and plant yourself in a balanced position.
- The second part is your introduction. Say your name and the pieces you'll be doing. You don't have to say who wrote the plays, but make sure you know just in case the director asks. If you're reading from the play itself, just introduce yourself and say what you'll be reading.
- The third part is your transition, which is like the curtain going up on your show. If you're doing a monologue, break eye contact with the auditors and shift your focus to a spot that's out toward them—downstage—and at your eye level. This is called spotting. You're locating an imaginary partner and speaking to that person. When you choose your focus, shift your stance to something more like the character's if you like. Then, breathe, connect, and begin.
- The fourth part is the monologue itself. With a monologue, you'll continue to refer back to that point of focus. As you rehearse the actual scene or monologue, begin to integrate what you know about the character with your physical and vocal choices. What you've learned about body and voice in previous lectures can inform you here. All movement should feel motivated and spontaneous; let what the character's doing in the scene dictate the movement.
 - As a general rule of thumb, don't sit for your entire scene or monologue. This can make you appear low energy and muddy your tactics. Plus, auditors often want to see how you move on stage. You also don't want to stand rooted to the same spot for the entire time. Find a reason to at least take a step or two or change your stance. On the other extreme, try to avoid unmotivated wandering. Too much pacing dissipates your power.

- Remember all that you have learned about voice and speech. Connect with your breath. Find the operatives in your piece—they'll carry the meaning and help you figure out what the character is trying to do. Consciously decide how "studied" your character's voice would sound, and use your vowels and consonants and speak the words clearly and completely. Remember to choose pace and phrasing appropriate to the piece and situation.
- Specific to auditioning, assess whether or not you tend to speed up or slow down when your adrenaline kicks in. Remind yourself to act on the lines and not between them. Pauses can be important for transitions, but taking too many makes them all ineffective. Give yourself an internal cue to slow down or connect your phrases depending on your tendency.
- Never worry about generating emotion for any scene. Emotion is the by-product of action. If you commit to fully pursuing your objective and playing your tactics, emotion will be spontaneous, connected, and honest. Instead, focus your efforts on figuring out what your character wants from the other person and how your character will get it.
- At the end of the monologue, it's time for the fifth part: the moment(s) after. Wait a beat after your last line. Then, say, "Thank you," and wait another beat. You've tied up your performance, and now you're giving the director a few seconds to think about what he or she wants to do next. Does he or she want you to read some more, do another piece, or come to a callback? It's at this point that the director or auditor might decide to interview you. Just like any interview, it's best to prepare and rehearse answers to the most common questions, including those about yourself and your recent work.
- You'll know when it's time for the sixth step when the auditor says something like, "Thanks for coming in today." That's your cue to smile and thank him or her for the opportunity to audition. Then, walk purposefully out of the room. Once you leave, even if you

thought your audition was terrible, keep it positive. Remember: You're still presenting your best self, even when you don't give your best audition.

Leading Up to the Audition

- In the days before the audition, take care of yourself physically—get enough sleep and make sure that you eat and drink the right foods. Practice all six steps of the audition multiple times. Take care of yourself mentally. Remember that the audition is an opportunity to perform, whether it leads to a role or not. Remind yourself that everyone seeing your audition/interview wants passionately to like you; they are there to cast and hire successfully and creatively.
- On the day of your audition, eat about an hour before—protein and complex carbohydrates to maintain energy. Warm up physically and vocally at home. Dress appropriately: Wear something that might suggest the character or position, but don't wear a costume. Make sure that whatever you choose to wear flatters your specific body type. Wear appropriate shoes. Consider color and what it can communicate. Accentuate your eyes. Get your hair off your face.
- The hour of your audition, stretch and loosen up your body. Go over your script. Remind yourself to keep your body open, shoulders down, and neck long. Do some speech exercises from Lecture 17. Remind yourself to listen and respond.
- When you're at the door about to walk in, do a quick alignment checkup: feet shoulder-width apart, hips stacked on thighs, long spine, shoulder blades down, head up. Breathe and tell your body to soften. Then, walk in, present your best self, and enjoy your audition.

Suggested Reading

Merlin and Prince, *Auditioning*.

Shurtleff, *Audition*.

Questions to Consider

1. You audition in any situation that is indefinite or impermanent. Pick one of the following events to observe: an interview, a significant social occasion, an important public hearing, or a meeting where a conflict is discussed and the stakes are high. Observe how participants enter the room, introduce themselves, get down to the matter at hand, pursue their objectives, and end and leave the event. Did they present their best selves with their bodies, voices, selection of material, level of preparation, and attire?
2. If you can, observe a theater audition and evaluate it using the principles you've learned in this lecture and in the course. Which performers present themselves in a compelling and effective way? Why? If others are less compelling, can you identify what habits or choices might be undermining the audition for them?
3. Attend an audition, just for the fun of it.

Preparing for the Performance

Lecture 21

In this lecture, you're going to imagine that you nailed your audition or interview and got the gig. You'll move from research and training into rehearsal and preparation. You've done the work of figuring out what you're doing, why you're doing it, and who you're doing it for; now it's time to explore how you'll present it. In this lecture, you will learn the rehearsal process step by step: from reading, to working on your feet in small sections, to putting your performance back together with run-throughs, and finally through tech and dress rehearsals.

Reading Out Loud

- The first step of rehearsing involves reading your text out loud, without any preconceived ideas about how you need to move or how you'll deliver your lines. Let your gut be your guide. You're not yet thinking about costumes or scenery; you're just experiencing the text out loud and seeing where your instincts lead.
- At this point, it's important not to force or squelch anything. It's too early to lock into big decisions. You also don't want to stifle any natural impulses you may have.
- If you're working with a group, resist the urge to try to impress people with displays of grand emotion or superhuman knowledge. If you have perfectionist tendencies, remind yourself not to judge your work, or anyone else's for that matter. Just experience your material by saying it out loud and listening.
- In theater, this is called a read-through, and it's often the first step toward a fully realized production. We gather around a table and experience the play together. At this first rehearsal, we're both actor and audience. We allow ourselves to enjoy the material without worrying about how we'll execute it—which comes later.

- Sometimes, we make notes about words or images that strike us or read certain sections over again. We might discuss meaning or action, but we don't make big decisions. We know that our best decisions will come from doing the material in rehearsal.

- When we develop a performance, we don't just imagine how we're going to deliver it. We don't just read over our material and expect to stand up and do it. That kind of preparation leads to winging it, and in that case, you get so caught up in just getting through it that you forget why you're there. So, you have to rehearse. But you want to rehearse productively.



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Reading your text out loud is the first step of rehearsing; the second step is standing up and rehearsing on your feet.

Rehearsing on Your Feet

- After we read out loud, we take the next step: We stand up. We begin to physically experience our material—not once, but many, many times. We start by making discoveries about movement and intention and by thinking about rhythm and energy. We physically experience how one action leads to another and then to another.
- A fully realized performance comes from this kind of repeated hands-on exploration. How you choose to present yourself is your

response to that exploration. After your initial reading, you feel your way through. You probe and experiment.

- If you're working with a coach or director, he or she will have a few ideas to share to help guide you. But strong performances grow not only from outside guidance, but from inner intuition as well. If you work from your own impulses, you'll own your performance.
- As you get on your feet, you'll want to approximate your performance conditions as best you can. In the rehearsal hall, imagine the people who are going to be sitting in the back row and rehearse at an energy level that will allow you to be heard and understood by them. If you wait until you're in your performance space to work at the energy level you're going to need, you'll end up setting patterns that don't fit your space.
- As you rehearse on your feet, try to make decisions with all the variables in mind. Come performance time, you'll add lights, sound, costumes, and people, so you want to get used to as much as you can in rehearsal. When you figure out the mechanics of your performance ahead of time, it frees you to focus on the art and joy of being present in your performance.
- If technology is going to be a major part of your performance, keep it simple and rehearse it early. And even at this early stage, have a backup plan in case your technology leaves you in the lurch.
- As you rehearse, you'll want to approximate what you're going to wear in performance. You want to find the swish and spin of your fabrics; you want to know the opportunities and limitations of your clothing. You don't have to have the exact pieces you'll have in performance, but choose reliable stand-ins.
- As you begin to make discoveries, it's best to rehearse in small chunks, such as one passage or scene at a time. It's also preferable to work in sequence, but you don't have to—as long as you have a clear understanding of the overall arc of your material.

- A by-product of this way of working is that it reduces the need to memorize. Going over your material paragraph by paragraph, scene by scene, on your feet, allows you to begin connecting your words to your intentions and your intentions to your body. Then, remembering what you need to do on stage becomes organic.
- Some people prefer to learn a whole speech or play before they begin to rehearse. For them, rote memorization takes away the distraction of having to carry a script while they're making physical choices. The disadvantage to rote memorization is that it can lead performers to make decisions about how they're going to do things before they understand all the variables.
- Once you've gone through your material step by step and made some decisions about specific intentions and movement, then you start to put your performance together. You start small—for example, if you're doing a speech, you might rehearse a short sequence like an introduction, a transition, and the first section. If you're doing a play, you might do the first two scenes. And you're still adjusting. You're just seeing how the smaller pieces fit together. And if they don't fit together, you try something new.
- Transitions—often called beats in theater—are the unsung heroes of any presentation. A beat or transition is a change in focus, a step in a new direction, a new vocal pitch for a new thought. A transition can be the moving of scenery or the clicking of one slide to the next. Transitions are important to the rhythm of a presentation, so mark them in your script and rehearse them.
- By now, your performance is beginning to have a rough, overall shape. It may look exactly as you imagined it when you did your research, or it may look wildly different because of what you've learned in rehearsal. Now it's time to put the whole thing back together and see what you've got. In the theater, we call this step a stumble-through, because performers have a lot to think about at this point, and they're bound to stumble over words, props, and transitions.

- But they push on. They begin to connect the dots on their feet. They figure out their path through the performance. Your stumble-through shows you the holes in your performance. You see what's working and what's not. You adjust. You rehearse. You start to understand how your performance hangs together.
- You've arrived at the stage of conscious competence—you know what you need to say and do on stage, but you have to think about it every second. But you need to be able to perform without thinking about it. You need to know your movement, talking points, and lines without wondering what's next. That's where repetition comes in.
- Never underestimate the power of repetition. It helps you stop thinking about when you move where and what you say when. Repetition allows you to digest all of your research and discovery so that you can truly inhabit your performance. The fear of failing or forgetting drops away. Repetition frees you to be truly present.

The Run-Through

- You move from the fits and starts of stumbling through your performance to smoothly running it from start to finish. This step in the process is called the run-through. When you run through your performance without stopping, you begin to understand the stamina you'll need to make it through the whole thing. You develop a solid structure to carry you from the beginning to the end.
- You're almost ready for an audience. You're in the final stages of the process. It's time to address last-minute preparations and technical concerns.
- If you're working on a play, this is when tech week begins. Tech week is the final countdown to opening, where the design staff and cast come together to work in lights, sound, and final costumes. At this point, actors incorporate all the elements of the performance—voice, speech, stage movement, costumes, scenery, lights, and focus.

The Dress Rehearsal

- At the dress rehearsal, everything—costumes, lights, scenery, props, and sound—is at show conditions. Theatrical performances typically build in two or three dress rehearsals before opening night. With public speaking engagements, you might have to negotiate rehearsal time in your venue before you're in front of an audience.
- If you are able to get a few hours in your speaking venue before the audience arrives, in order to maximize your precious time, arrive early. Give yourself time to explore the whole space. Look at the size. If you're in a large room without amplification, realize that you may need more breath and consonant energy to be heard.
- Then, look at the construction of the space. Wood conducts sound and helps your voice resonate. Sound bounces off of cement, glass, or tiles, so you may need to use more chest resonance and clearer articulation to compensate. You also may have to slow down your pace so that the echo of your voice doesn't cover up what you have to say next. Carpets, curtains, cushions, and even people's bodies absorb sound; you may need to adjust your breath energy and speech clarity.
- You also want to explore the audience's perspective. Take a few minutes to sit in the audience and look at the stage from their eyes. Sit in various seats to understand the level of sound and physical energy you'll need to reach people in different locations. You'll also want to gain some idea of sightlines, which are the audience's line of vision—how much they can see from where they're sitting.
- If you're working with a microphone, make sure you do a sound check. If it's a stationary microphone, practice adjusting it. If it's a handheld one, get to know its weight and the optimal distance it'll need to be from your mouth. If you plan to wear a lavalier microphone, decide with the help of a technician where to place it on your clothes, and try to hide the cord if you can.

- If you plan to use any other technology, check that as well. Click through your slides and make any last-minute adjustments.
- Once you've preset your props or papers, gone through your slides, or figured out where you'll put your microphone or remote, it's time for your dress rehearsal. Warm up if you haven't already; then, go through your speech with all the lights, sound, and technology you'll have in performance.
- Preparing takes time, but your reward is a performance well delivered and well received. Unfortunately, the longer you'll perform, the longer your rehearsal process needs to be; a shorter presentation requires less rehearsal time. And the more often you perform in front of other people, the easier it gets.

Suggested Reading

Barton, *Acting*.

Berkun, *Confessions of a Public Speaker*, Chap. 7.

Hagen, with Frankel, *Respect for Acting*.

Questions to Consider

1. Try creating your own rehearsal schedule for a real or fictitious public speaking engagement or audition. Use a calendar and work backward from the performance day. Factor in daily time for research (nine questions) and rehearsal, and then tech rehearsal and dress rehearsal. (As a general guide, consider scheduling an hour of rehearsal time per page or per minute of performance.) Remember, it's always easier to schedule more time and cut back than it is to try to cram more rehearsals in at the last minute.
2. Using the rehearsal schedule and techniques outlined in this lecture, rehearse a one-minute piece of your choosing. After your initial research, experiment with different choices of how to move and speak

to achieve your purpose. When you are ready, ask a trusted friend to watch. See if the friend can answer Uta Hagen's nine questions based on your performance.

Using Stage Fright Energy

Lecture 22

Almost everyone feels nervous before they perform, even if they've been performing most of their lives. The first step to harnessing nervous energy is preparation. You practice, and you focus on all the factors you can control, because there will be things you can't control. But practice and repetition are only one side of the coin. The other side is mental preparation—making your nerves work for you. In this lecture, you will learn to do that, with the following four ideas: put your performance in perspective, banish the critic on your shoulder, imagine yourself succeeding, and focus on your partner.

Put Your Performance in Perspective

- To put your performance in perspective, you need to realize that nobody has ever died of stage fright; acting or public speaking will not kill you. Even though your body tells you that death may be imminent, it's really not. Every day, all over the world, people speak in front of other people and live to tell the tale. You will, too.
- Keep in mind that you already perform, almost all the time. If you've ever told a story to your coworkers or described a scene to your friends—if you've ever talked to more than one person at a time—you've performed in front of an audience. And you'll do it many more times.
- The presentation you're about to do is just one performance in a lifetime of performances. Performance is temporary. So, walk out there, do your best, and know that it will be over soon.
- As a performer, it's easy to become attached to the outcomes. You work hard, and you want people to appreciate you. You don't want to look foolish or incompetent. You don't want to bore people. And if you've done your homework and prepared your performance, you probably won't.

- Your identity can get caught up in all of this. So, remind yourself that your performance is a personal expression, but it isn't *you*. If you make a mistake or the audience is less than responsive, you'll still be here, but your performance won't. So, do your show as you rehearsed it, and don't try to knock the ball out of the park. Just get on base.

Banish the Critic on Your Shoulder

- Often, performers do think that they have to knock the ball out of the park. They decide that their performance has to be brilliant, or they're a failure. Their presentation must be perfect, or it's nothing. But just like life, live performance is fluid. So, no presentation, scene, or argument will ever be perfect. You will never, ever deliver the perfect performance.



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- Sometimes in acting class or in rehearsal, you'll hear about "the critic on your shoulder." You can find this phrase in books on creativity, filmmaking, and psychology—books we go to for advice when we're hampered by self-judgment or unrealistic expectations.
- The critic on your shoulder judges everything you do. The critic is an expert at either-or thinking, which can paralyze your performance. The critic hurls insults, especially those that undermine your confidence. Occasionally, the critic pays you a compliment, but it usually comes right back at you with a warning not to get complacent or too big for your britches.

People with stage fright might feel like death is upon them, but in reality, their performance will not kill them.

- The critic on your shoulder undercuts the joy and immediacy of your work, either by keeping you in the past or flinging you into the future. The critic tells us, on stage and sometimes in life, that if we just worked harder, managed our time differently, or had more talent, we'd perform—or even be—better.
- As performers, and maybe as people, we constantly have to accept imperfection. We constantly need to forgive ourselves. Everything will not go as planned in your performance, or in your life. So, move forward anyway. Make peace with where you are now, and be present. Focus on your goal.
- Think about what you're doing, not about how well you're doing it. Because in the end, it's not about being brilliant. It's not about being perfect. It's about serving your purpose.

Imagine Yourself Succeeding

- Trying to meet a rigid standard of perfection is counter to the joy and ease that's possible in performance. But you can imagine yourself performing well. You can imagine yourself stepping out on stage and delivering a sure-handed performance.
- Success comes in many forms. So, when you imagine yourself succeeding, give yourself more than one image of what success looks like. If you're acting in a play, imagine yourself physically pursuing your objective in each scene. And before you enter, imagine the events immediately leading up to that scene. You can successfully communicate a great deal about your relationships and intentions in those first few seconds on stage if you visualize what happened just before your entrance.
- If you're speaking, imagine yourself striding out toward the audience with a smile on your face. Imagine that you plant yourself, pause, breathe, and begin. Visualize the arc of your speech with all the points you're going to hit. And then imagine specific moments of success.

- For some people, just standing up and getting through the performance is a major victory, and that's worthy of celebration. For others, it's a triumph to stand tall and connect with your breath so that your voice won't shake. You might feel a sense of accomplishment seeing your audience nod in recognition or respond to one of your questions, or you might rejoice in feeling a natural freedom in your arms as you gesture.
- Imagine every success you can have as a performer, no matter how small. Imagine building one success upon another. And then rejoice when they happen, because they will.
- Finally, don't forget to physicalize your image of success. Practicing strong physical postures makes you feel stronger. So, strut a little bit while you wait to go on. Widen your base. Put your hands on your hips. If you're uncomfortable doing this backstage, do it in your dressing room or at home before you leave.

Focus on Your Partner

- There are many techniques you can use to imagine yourself succeeding. But once you step on stage, it's time to take the focus off yourself and put it on your partner, whether it's your scene partner, your colleagues, or an audience.
- Orienting toward your goal frees you to think about what you're doing instead of how well you're doing it, and the way to make that goal specific is to put it in terms of your partner. What do you want from your partner? What tactics will you use on your partner to get it? How can you test your success in terms of your partner?
- Focusing on your partner keeps your critic at bay. It lets your audience buy into your story. It allows you to spend your performance energy on what you can control—the clear pursuit of your objective—instead of what you can't control, like whether or not an audience will like you.

- If you specifically and truthfully pursue what you want from your partner, you create this amazing cycle of action and response. The energy feeds on itself. Your partner will respond to you, which causes you to respond to your partner, which evokes another response, and so on. This reciprocal exchange is so much more exciting and effective than actors or speakers droning on without checking to see if what they're saying is having any impact on whom they're talking to.
- Even if you're the one doing most of the talking, don't forget to listen to your fellow actors or your audience. Listen to their voices, sighs, laughter, and physicality, and then respond. Before you know it, your scene or speech becomes a true dialogue. And you're always less nervous when you have someone to talk to.
- If your partner is the audience, you won't have had the benefit of rehearsing with them. But you can get a head start even before your presentation begins. Many presenters try to connect with their audience before the event, including shaking hands with them as they arrive. It's a great way to build rapport and get an idea of your audience's expectations.
- Even if you don't have the opportunity to talk to your audience beforehand, at least try to get a good look at them. You know who they are collectively because you've done your homework, but pick out some individuals and get to know their faces, hair, and clothes. Watch them in action. Use these newly familiar faces as touchstones during your performance. Even when you're really nervous, you can look from one to another and create the illusion of eye contact until you can actually do it.
- Focusing on your partner reminds you that while you're the performer, your performance isn't actually just about you. You have to have someone else present for it to be a performance. So, performing is about reaching another person or a group of people as effectively as you can. If you can step outside your own experience

of apprehension and focus your goal on your partner, you can harness your nervous energy. You can use it to serve your purpose.

Tips for the Terrified

- A small percentage of people are not just nervous—they're heart-stoppingly terrified. These people would do anything not to perform. If you truly have a phobia, you might need to work with a coach or psychologist, who can devise a system of steps to help you get beyond it. Often, the steps involve first speaking to inanimate objects, then to one person, then to a few more, and ultimately to an audience.
- But for people who are merely terror stricken, the following tips will get you over the hump. Some of them aren't optimal ways to perform, but they can get you through the fear and help you find the courage to keep trying.
 - Pinpoint exactly what it is that terrifies you. Is it not knowing the answers? Is it looking foolish? Is it being underprepared or wasting other people's time? Sometimes, if you can name your demons, you can work to eliminate them.
 - If, in your terror, you have to hold on to a podium or a pencil to get through a speech, do it. You'll let go eventually, after you've been through it a few times.
 - If you absolutely have to read your speech word for word, go ahead. It's better to be stiff than silent.
 - Even though it's not preferable, if making eye contact with your audience will leave you speechless, look in the general vicinity of their faces until you can meet their eyes. It may happen further into your speech, or it may happen a few speeches down the road.
 - Keep in mind that human beings are generous creatures. No one wants you to fail. Most people truly want to hear what you

have to say. Mostly, they're just glad it's you up there talking and not them.

- Breathe. Deeply. Your breath will support you in everything. It prepares your body. It sustains your voice. And it'll steady your mind and carry you through.

Suggested Reading

Esposito, *Getting Over Stage Fright*.

Morgan, *Give Your Speech, Change the World*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you have a critic on your shoulder when you perform? If so, what does your critic say? Make a list of your critic's comments. Consider where these ideas come from—whether they stem from a negative experience, another person, or no one in particular. Then, cross out each negative comment and convert it to its opposite. Change your critic to a coach: Keep and reread your new list of positive comments before you step on stage.
2. List three specific, attainable goals for your next performance. Keep them simple. Examples might be “warm up physically for my performance,” “take five deep breaths before I begin my speech,” or “make eye contact with at least two people in the audience.” Try to do all three in your next performance, and celebrate your success.

Working the Crowd with Confidence

Lecture 23

In this lecture, you will learn about working the crowd—sustaining your performance beyond the first few seconds—by examining three strategies. You will also learn some practical tips on how to use these strategies in performance. To connect with your audience and hold their attention, use the following three strategies: claim your power as a performer by setting the scene with your energy and structure; keep your performance simple by carefully choosing your structure, words, and movement; and actively engage your viewers with variety, creativity, and low-risk participation.

Claim Your Power

- The first strategy for sustaining attention is claiming your power. Never forget that as a performer, you have the power that comes from knowing that you're there to achieve your purpose—to do your work. So, give yourself permission to take charge. You need to drive your story forward with confidence and deliver your message in the most compelling way possible.
- You want the absolute best experience for your audience, but you have to show them what the best experience is. To do that, you have to set the scene and act the part. Setting the scene involves setting the pace, tone, mood, and rhythm. You need to do this early and definitively.
- For you to set the scene, you need to think about both performance technique and structure. Your technique consists of all the skills you've explored in this course, including alignment, breath support, connection to your voice and all its variety, speech, phrasing, the shape and pace of your movement, and how often you smile and make eye contact with people. All of these things together shape your individual performance.

- But you also set the scene with your structure. If you're speaking, how formal will you be? How will you structure your ideas? How long will you talk? If you're acting, what aspect of the story will you make immediately clear to your audience? At what rate do you need to move through the play to make the story clear? Of course, you'll have worked on all of these questions before you step on stage, in your rehearsals and in your research. But it helps to think of them in terms of how you'll apply them from the beginning.
- With public speaking, setting the scene may be distilling your purpose down to simple, persuasive terms and saying them early. With a play, you might set your scene with your entrance and initial action. Whether it's a play or a speech, most audiences do like to have a general idea of what they can expect.
- So, start with a hook, such as an arresting image, an opening question, a story, or a joke. Then, with speaking, move immediately to the reason the audience is there. Then, outline your structure—how long you'll be talking and the key points you'll cover. Your first moment on stage is your best chance of hooking your audience.
- In addition to setting the scene with your technique and structure, you also have to act the part. And the only way you can act the part is to know who your audience is and what they expect from you. Then, you can either act the role or tailor your best self to fit the circumstance.
- The audience has a certain expectation of a performer based on the event, the material, the billing, or even the political office. You need to know what that expectation is, and you need to act the part, even if you don't feel confident or don't feel like the expert on this particular product.
- When you're in front of an audience, look and act the part, and do so with joy and gusto. This might mean being a more energized version of who you naturally are in real life. You claim your

power—you take charge—by being the most compelling, positive, dynamic version of yourself you can possibly be.

Keep Your Performance Simple

- You keep your performance simple by keeping your structure, language, and movement simple. Keeping your structure simple—stating your purpose and outlining two to four main ideas—helps your audience feel secure. You set them up to absorb your speech and, hopefully, to remember it.
- Public speaking is the art of choosing what *not* to say. The same goes for acting: There are a thousand choices you can make, but your performance is most effective if you make the choices that serve the text, the production, and the audience.
- In some ways, the art of performing isn't all that different from the art of having a simple life: You decide what's most important and eliminate the things that dissipate your energy. To keep your performance simple, decide what you most need to communicate and let the other stuff go. Keep it simple by choosing carefully.
- With public speaking, it also helps to keep your language simple. It's not that you need to dumb down your message, and it's not that you don't need to know your subject. You do. Some of the most profound speeches express lofty ideas in the simplest, most powerful language possible. So, whenever you can, try to deliver even the most complex information in simple language.
- We don't speak the way we write. When we speak, we use short sentences. We get to the point. We use contractions. We don't use a lot of subordinate clauses. And most of the time, we don't use words with more than four syllables.
- Think of a speech as a conversation with your audience. Whatever kind of performance you're doing—acting, speaking, presenting, or even just convincing someone to buy a product—you have to pay attention to your partner. Your partner—your audience—may not

talk back, but you're still in dialogue with their responses—their body language, movement, and rustlings and rumblings. If you pay attention and respond to your partner, your partner is much more likely to pay attention and respond to you.

- Keep your structure, language, and movement simple. We live in an age where people try to do a lot of things at once—we multitask. We're busy people; we've got to get things done. But the stage is not a place to multitask.
- Crafting a performance is like stringing together beads on a necklace. Each bead is a unit of action. And even if your beads are straightforward tasks like stating a fact, clicking a PowerPoint slide, and asking a question, choose a sequence and string one at a time.
- In comedy, when you tell a joke, you get a bigger laugh if you don't move on your punch line. An audience has a really difficult time taking in two things at once—words and movement—even in this age of smartphones and Facebook. They'll almost always miss something.
- All speeches, even ones that aren't funny, have punch lines. Every segment of a speech has a main idea you're building up to. You've got to make sure that those ideas are in the clear. And one of the simplest ways to do this is to stay still while you're delivering them.

Actively Engage Your Viewers

- What if, despite all your preparation and energy, you see people looking at the ceiling, squirming around, or checking their smartphones during your performance? Of course, you might set up rules at the beginning and require everyone to shut down electronic devices during your talk. But what about those times when you can't do that? How do you keep the audience engaged while you're performing?
- Like a piece of music, a presentation needs variety. You can create variety by changing rhythm and delivery. So, maybe you spend



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Visual aids engage the audience and add variety to any presentation.

part of the time speaking, part of the time using visuals, and part of the time fielding questions or getting your audience to engage in some hands-on activity. Think of simple, creative ways to make your points.

- Once you're in the body of your speech, you might want to actively involve your audience, especially if they're shy. You can invite them to participate in low-risk activities like "show of hands" questions. People like to answer questions, especially if they can do it while staying relatively anonymous.
- Some groups will dive right in to participation; others have to wade in gradually. An activity that might be conducted in a performance class is pairing up people to interview one another. They get about two minutes each to conduct an interview. Then, each person is asked to introduce their partner to the class. With their focus on someone else, they find it much easier to talk in front of the group.

The interviewee sometimes interjects with added information, or clarification, and suddenly you've got a public dialogue.

- Another technique to try with a shy group is the “think, pair, share” model developed by University of Maryland professor Frank Lyman. You ask a question, give a minute or so of silence for people to think about and note their thoughts, and then pair them up with a partner to discuss them. Finally, they share their thoughts with the group. This way, they don't feel alone or put on the spot. This is commonly used in classes and workshops rather than speeches.
- You might find the humor in a situation. Tell a joke, if you can tell a good one. If you have a funny interaction with an audience member at the beginning of your talk, return to that person once or twice, as long as the interaction can stay positive. It's another relationship—another chance to connect.
- Don't forget to hold for laughs. In other words, don't continue your scene or speech until the laugh begins to die down, because if you try to talk over laughter, eventually the audience will stop laughing—they don't want to miss anything.
- When all else fails, resort to bribery. In his book *Confessions of a Public Speaker*, Scott Berkun admits to handing out free copies of his books for the first people who will move down to the front row or a Starbucks card to the first person who answers a question.
- Don't forget to work the crowd after your presentation. When you arrive at your venue, try to stake out a strategic place for a final meet and greet, if that's appropriate. It's a great way to connect one last time—to clarify a point you made or answer a question someone was too shy to ask in front of everyone else. You can even get feedback on your performance. You'll learn what worked and what didn't, and what people take away with them as they leave.

Suggested Reading

Humes, *Speak Like Churchill, Stand Like Lincoln*.

Morgan, *Forbes* blog, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorgan/>.

Questions to Consider

1. Think of a recent or upcoming scenario where you will need to set your stage and act the part. Decide how you'll look—what you'll wear and how you'll stand, walk, and sit. Decide how you'll start—what you'll say and do first. Decide the structure of your performance and how you'll vary it to hold the audience's attention. Rehearse your presentation until you feel confident.
2. Think of one simple but creative way to illustrate a point in a speech, meeting, or conversation. Use a prop. Ask your audience to participate in some small way. Think of an engaging story that clearly demonstrates a specific idea.

Stage Presence—A Way of Life

Lecture 24

In this final lecture, you will step back and ask the big questions: What can stage presence teach us about presence in all forms? What do performers—actors, dancers, teachers, clowns—have in common? What can we learn from master performers—those brave souls who repeatedly offer their gifts to engage and question the world? What master performers do can be boiled down to five key essentials: They pay attention, tell the truth, take risks, steal, and find their light. Master performers teach us that presence can be a way of life.

Performers Pay Attention

- Performers pay attention to the world; they notice the details. They see and appreciate the designs of everyday life, wherever they are. Then, they reflect those designs on stage.
- For example, the master of mime Marcel Marceau created circuses, skating rinks, dance halls, parks, and cages without any props or scenery. He chased butterflies, held snakes, walked against the wind, and put his head in the lion's mouth. And he did all of these things by responding to the world he imagined. But before Marcell Marceau could imagine the world on stage, he had to pay close attention to the real world around him.
- Performers understand that action is a cycle of cause and effect with the world around them. Something happens that causes them to want, which causes them to act, which causes them to move and speak and, finally, to affect the world.
- Master performers see architecture, skylines, open fields, or wind and clouds, and they reflect what they see in the angle and direction of their movement and in the rhythm and cadence of their speech. They pay attention to history, culture, climate, and people and let it inform what they choose to say and how they choose to say it.

- When we pay attention to the world, we begin to understand why people do what they do. And we make conscious choices about what action we want to take. So, master performers pay attention to the world, but they also pay attention to each other. They know they're most effective when they're focusing outside themselves. They also know that if they make their partners look good, they make themselves look good.
- In this course, you've learned how to give and take physical focus with stillness, movement, and positioning. But what you can learn from master performers is that attention is a gift. It's a gift of time and focus. We can give it to ourselves, by taking care of our instrument—our bodies and voices. We can give it to others by being more aware and generous with our fellow performers in life.

Performers Tell the Truth

- When we pay attention, when we stay in the present moment, we can see the truth in front of us. And when we can see the truth, we can tell the truth.



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Performers pay attention to the world around them, see and tell the truth, take risks, steal from other performers, and find their light.

- Performance—whether it's comedy, dance, drama, or mime—is a heightened expression of the truth. And the truth is that sometimes we're imperfect. Sometimes we're unreasonable. We fumble. We make colossal mistakes. We do inappropriate things. And we do them because we're human.
- Think about Dustin Hoffman as Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, Vivien Leigh as Blanche, Marlon Brando as Stanley, or Lawrence Olivier as King Lear. We empathize with these characters and with the actors playing them because they tell the truth.
- We know what it is to prioritize destructive things—to put our faith in the wrong person or idea. We know what it is to lie or want to lie. We know what it is to be prideful, punitive, or weak. We understand love. We understand regret. But the truth of being human doesn't have to be profound. There's as much truth in the everyday as there is in the extraordinary.
- Think about master clowns like Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, or Lucille Ball. We see the truth in their characters as well. We recognize the ridiculous heights many of us will go to win a battle, prove ourselves, or get the girl.
- When performers tell the truth, they let us in. They invite us to empathize. They engage something inside of us. They give us permission to recognize our own imperfections or stand up for our own causes. They let us know that we're not alone.

Performers Take Risks

- To tell the truth, you have to risk being yourself. You have to risk exposure. You even have to risk failure.
- For most of us, just walking out the door in the morning is a risk. But master performers take a risk every time they step on stage. And they don't play it safe once they get there. They can't. They have to leap without the net, or yell as if their life depended on it, or face an out-of-control machine.

- Lucille Ball was one of the greatest risk takers in comedy. Think of the barriers Lucy broke. She was a beautiful woman who wasn't afraid to take pratfalls, black out her teeth, or take a pie in the face. A female clown like this in the 1950s was unheard of. And during a time when women's roles were prescribed, the whole premise of *I Love Lucy* was that she was trying to choose for herself. She didn't want to be a housewife; she wanted to be a showgirl. So, she played the saxophone and sang—badly—and tossed pizzas and stomped grapes. She was hilarious.
- But amazingly, Lucy insisted that she was not funny. She said that the writers were funny, the directors were funny, the situations were funny. "What I am," Lucy said, "is brave." Master performers know that if you're going to risk looking like a fool or speaking your truth in a difficult situation, sometimes you have to be brave.
- Master performers take risks. They know that whether they succeed or fail, risk taking is a path to growth. Risk is healthy. If you're going to try something new, change directions, or present a new idea, sometimes you have to do it without knowing what the outcome will be. You have to do it without knowing whether the audience will laugh or boo.
- And sometimes the audience will boo. Jim Carrey, another gifted comedian, says that he bombed his first gig at the Hollywood Improv. At the time, he had a booking for *The Tonight Show*, but after the studio executives saw him at the Improv, they canceled it.
- Many might have packed it in after that and gone home. But Jim Carrey understood what a lot of risk takers know: Failure is one of the quickest ways to learn something new. So, instead of being immobilized by that initial failure, Jim Carrey kept working, and he eventually landed the *The Tonight Show* again. That time, he did the physical impressions he's now famous for, and the rest is history.

Performers Steal

- Master performers steal—and stealing is a tradition that’s as old as performance itself. Shakespeare stole. *The Comedy of Errors* was based on Plautus’s *Menaechmi*. *As You Like It* was taken from Thomas Lodge’s *Rosalynde* and then embellished. A lot of stock characters we have today—the braggart soldier or cop; the crafty servant; the sweet, young lovers—are stock characters from the Italian commedia dell’arte in the 16th century.
- Artists have stolen for generations. They watch each other. They study the masters. They borrow steps, postures, gags, and stories. Then, they turn them into something new.
- Bill Irwin, the award-winning actor and master clown, is famous for this. He openly acknowledges the influences of clowns like Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. He does all the old shtick: farce chases with trampolines, amazing hat tricks, fights with his own clothes, and clothing swaps.
- But Bill Irwin brings a new take to these old gags. He gets you to believe that he’s pulled a sweet little bunny from a hat and immediately waves it around as a fake. He uses circus boots to balance at an impossible angle on stage and simultaneously discusses the benefits and drawbacks of cantilevers.
- Irwin takes what Chaplin and Keaton gave us—what the vaudevillians gave them, and what commedia gave the vaudevillians—and he builds on it to fit the time and place he’s in.
- When you’re paying attention to the world, be conscious about what and who you choose as your influences. Observe the masters of your craft, whatever your craft may be. Watch their technique. Note their triumphs and mistakes. Take what they give you and make it your own. Or use it to springboard into something entirely new.

- Performers can be very gracious people. So, many of the masters are willing to give to their fellow performers. Master performers know that giving is key. In an atmosphere of give and take, where the best idea wins no matter whose it is, real artistry can flourish.

Performers Find Their Light

- Graciousness comes from a sense of joy. The reason master performers are gracious and generous is that they know how to find their light. They find what gives them the most joy, and they do that thing.
- At a tech rehearsal in the theater, you'll often hear a director or stage manager reminding an actor to find his or her light. Finding your light means to find the warmest, brightest spot on stage and step into its center. It means taking the stage and allowing yourself to be seen. The center of the light is where the performer is most visible; it's where a performer's purpose can be most clearly understood.
- Your warmest, brightest spot may or may not be on the stage. It might be in a boardroom, church, or classroom. It might be across a sales counter, desk, or restaurant table. There are many places where light can be warmest and brightest—places where you can offer yourself to others with clarity and focus.
- Find what gives you the most joy and do that thing as much as you can. It's joy that brings you back to do the work day after day. It's joy that gets you out of bed in the morning. The great actress and teacher Uta Hagen took joy in teaching her students, so she gave up a career in Hollywood and taught until she was 84.
- Sometimes, finding your light requires coming from a place of darkness. Darkness and uncertainty are part of the creative process. Sometimes, we have to muddle through the dark for a period of time. The key is to keep stepping, in diligent practice and thought, until the pool of light opens—because it will. But only if you keep stepping.

- So, find your light. Identify the performance conditions that allow you to feel most confident. Recall the moments when you've given your most satisfying performances up to now. What do they have in common?
- Maybe you felt extremely prepared or especially warmed up. Maybe you had a supportive audience that was just the right size for you. Maybe you were rested and able to summon the right amount of energy to pursue your objective. Maybe you picked the right material or the right time of day or wore clothes that made you feel especially confident.
- Resolve to give yourself those circumstances more often, because when you set yourself up to do your best work, you can step into your light with confidence—you can fully inhabit any performance you choose to do.

Suggested Reading

Barton, *Acting*.

Cameron, *The Artist's Way*.

Questions to Consider

1. Choose an actor, a clown, a dancer, a mime, or a speaker that you believe to be a masterful performer. Study his or her work in at least two performances. What techniques are consistent throughout this person's work? What kind of effort does he or she use? How does he or she handle physical freedom, rhythm, timing, voice, and speech? In what moments do you see clear, authentic impulses and responses? How can this performer's work inform your own?
2. List the circumstances that allow you to perform at your best on the stages you encounter. How can you create those circumstances more often?

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Consultants

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Cynthia Barrett, Atlanta Voice Coaching

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